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# The Sergeants Major of the Army

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Mark F. Gillespie  
Glen R. Hawkins • Michael B. Kelly  
Preston E. Pierce

Center of Military History  
United States Army  
Washington, D.C., 1995



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# Foreword


**T**he central role which the noncommissioned officer (NCO) plays in shaping the Army in peace and war has long been recognized. During times of peace, NCOs train, discipline, and develop those entrusted to their leadership. In wartime, the NCO assumes even greater responsibility for the soldiers he leads in battle. Throughout our nation's history, talented, dedicated NCOs have served bravely, effectively, and with quiet professionalism. They have carried out their demanding missions with minimal fanfare. The Army and the nation are eternally in their debt.

The creation of the Office of the Sergeant Major of the Army in 1966 officially acknowledged two trends: the expanding nature of the NCO's duties and responsibilities and the increasing importance of NCO professionalism. The superb noncommissioned officers selected for service as the Sergeant Major of the Army (SMA) did not simply appear overnight. They were selected from among a corps of professional soldiers who had extraordinary records of service and unlimited potential for growth.

This firsthand account of our changing Army and of NCOs adapting as we transitioned from a conscript force to the all-volunteer Army underscores the ability and dedication to duty that have been the hallmarks of their careers. At the pinnacle of his profession, each SMA also influenced the development of the Office of the Sergeant Major of the Army. Their stories collectively reflect the course of the U.S. Army from World War II through the challenges of today. Their careers exemplify the enhanced quality, education, and professionalism of the NCO corps.

This volume is a companion piece to earlier Center of Military History publications about the Army's senior civilian and military leadership. It is altogether fitting that we add this book about the Sergeants Major of the Army to that distinguished library.

JOHN W. MOUNTCASTLE  
Brigadier General, U.S. Army  
Chief of Military History



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# Preface

**T**his history of the Sergeants Major of the Army fills a long-standing gap in the history of the United States Army. The Army's noncommissioned officer corps has always stood proudly in the front ranks to serve the nation in war and peace, in good times and bad. For too long, though, this selfless service has passed unnoticed. In one sense the lack of recognition of the NCO is a testimony to his or her professional dedication and sense of duty. The NCO was always there when needed. The NCO always did what was needed. And the NCO was all too often taken for granted.

The advent of high technology warfare placed new demands on all ranks, perhaps none more so than NCOs. Not only did they have to train soldiers, they had to learn along with their squads, platoons, companies, and battalions as the U.S. Army adapted its doctrine and warfighting to meet the demands of the twenty-first century. Yet many of the Sergeants Major of the Army cut their teeth during World War II. They served in Korea and Vietnam during hot wars and everywhere from Germany to Indonesia during cold wars.

Their stories are the centerpiece of this book. None enlisted or was drafted with the promise of becoming a future Sergeant Major of the Army. None received special treatment. Some left the Army only to reenlist later. Others thought about leaving the Army. But each one of them made the Army his career and reached the top of his profession. Again and again they credit an NCO who impressed them in basic training and became a role model for them. They speak of the bygone massive Army of World War II, of the Army at war in frozen Korea and sweltering Vietnam, of the all-volunteer Army, of the garrison and post Army, but most importantly they speak of, for, and to the men and women of the Army.

The first part of this book describes the origin and growth of the Office of the Sergeant Major of the Army (OSMA). It explains why someone saw a need for such an office and tells who supported it, who made it work, and why it succeeded so well. Each Sergeant Major of the Army made lasting contributions to the office during his tenure. The sections on individual SMAs uncover their motivations, goals, and accomplishments. About half of each section is a general account of the respective Sergeant Major's service. The other half focuses on his role as Sergeant Major of the Army. The insights and perspectives of the Sergeants Major of the Army come from years of experience, training, professional development, and individual dedication to the Army. At the end of each section is a chronological list of each SMA's duty assignments.

The appendix to this book gives a table showing the Presidents, Secretaries of the Army, and Chiefs of Staff under whom the respective Sergeants Major served.

The project was initially beset by changing organizational parameters and/or lack of author continuity. However, in 1992 Col. Fred Van Horn, then commandant of the Sergeants Major Academy, approached Brig. Gen. Harold Nelson, the chief of military history at that time, about reviving the long dormant project. Since then, under the direction of professional historians, four officers share the credit for compiling and writing this volume. Maj. Glen Hawkins began the work, organized the concept, and wrote the section on the history of the OSMA. Without Major Hawkins' dedication and hard work, the project might again have been delayed. When Hawkins retired, Maj. Michael Kelly took over the project. Major Kelly worked tirelessly to coordinate interviews, administer various details, and write three of the essays. When Major Kelly retired, Maj. Preston Pierce, an individual mobilization augmentee, assumed the project and authored another three sections. Finally, Maj. Mark Gillespie completed the book. He wrote two sections, interviewed Sgt. Maj. of the Army Richard A. Kidd, and saw the work through to publication. Each officer deserves much credit—had any one of them faltered, this book would not have been published.

Sgt. Maj. (Ret.) Erwin Koehler interviewed seven of the eight former Sergeants Major of the Army for this book. His questions form the basis of the individual essays. Sergeant Major Wooldridge's section is a composite of an earlier interview and published remarks in various Army journals. Both Sergeant Major of the Army Kidd and the Army Chief of Staff, General Gordon R. Sullivan, provided wholehearted support for this project. Without their generous assistance, this book could not have been published.

A number of individuals at the U.S. Army Center of Military History deserve recognition for their important contributions to this work. Dr. Jeffrey Clarke, chief historian, served as a rigorous and exacting reader; John W. Elsberg, editor in chief, directed the publication of this book; Catherine A. Heerin and Diane M. Donovan edited the manuscript into its final form; John Birmingham designed and electronically produced the pages; and Dr. Lawrence M. Kaplan of the Military Studies Branch helped revise a number of draft chapters of the manuscript.

This book tells the story of more than the Sergeants Major of the Army. It tells about the NCO in the Army. It gives today's soldiers and NCOs a perspective from the past on the Army's future path. The views expressed in this publication are those of the respective Sergeants Major of the Army and do not reflect the official policy or position of the Department of the Army, the Department of Defense, or the U.S. government.

EDWARD J. DREA  
Chief, Research and  
Analysis Division

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# **The Office of the Sergeant Major of the Army**



*"Signal Corps"* by Mead Schaeffer.



# **The Office of the Sergeant Major of the Army**

One of the most important office locations in our nation's capital is the Pentagon's "E Ring," or outer hallway. There lie the offices of the most powerful civilian and military leaders in the defense establishment, as well as their key advisers and critical subordinates. The Sergeant Major of the Army (SMA) occupies Room 3E677, just across the hall from the Chief of Staff of the Army (CSA). Here the Army's top noncommissioned officer, with the assistance of a small personal staff, performs his duties and fulfills his responsibilities as a principal adviser to the CSA. The SMA is the chief's expert in all matters concerning the enlisted force. He is not only an ombudsman for Army enlisted personnel but, as a member of various boards and committees, also directly influences policies whose effects ripple throughout the Army.

At the highest levels of the Army, the Sergeant Major of the Army represents enlisted men and women. As someone who has been where they are, he listens to their complaints and comments, considers the impact of policy decisions from their perspective, carries their views and voices their concerns to the decision-makers in the Pentagon, and focuses solely on their interests without being pulled or driven by other

staff considerations. As such, he serves as a direct and personal communication line from the soldiers in the field to the CSA and senior Army staff officers. The Sergeant Major of the Army's job is to comment on the enlisted Army, carrying to the chief all the news, good and bad, regarding the state of the enlisted force based on his experience.

For the noncommissioned officer corps, the Sergeant Major of the Army also serves as a role model for the youngest corporal as well as the most senior command sergeant major (CSM). Providing career inspiration by example, he motivates soldiers to professional accomplishments and feats of excellence they might otherwise not achieve. The very existence of the Office of the Sergeant Major of the Army (OSMA) supports and validates the position of the noncommissioned officer corps as professional—worthy of special respect for commitment, expertise, dedication, and sacrifice in service to the nation.

It seems natural—even logical—that we should have an Office of the Sergeant Major of the Army, as the pinnacle of achievement for a distinguished enlisted career, with a prestigious location in the Pentagon and ready access to the senior commissioned officer of the Army. After all, this position reflects the situation at many

lower levels of command, beginning with battalions, where the sergeant major is the senior enlisted soldier who serves and advises the organization commander in the myriad of areas affecting enlisted soldiers. Before 1966, however, the Army staff had not specifically designated anyone to represent the views of the enlisted Army and to be their spokesperson. There was no one to visit soldiers worldwide, listen to what they had to say, then take the message back to the highest echelons of the Army staff. No one presented the enlisted perspective to the highest levels of Army leadership. No one had the primary duty—rather than one of many duties as part of normal staff functions and missions—to watch out for the interests and concerns of the enlisted ranks. There was no one to act as a distinct, highly visible example and unifying role model to non-commissioned officers Army-wide. Establishment and development of the OSMA did not just happen overnight. Its origins are in fact rooted in the history of the NCO corps, the rank of sergeant major, and the increasing professionalism within the Army over the years.

### The Sergeant Major

The title of sergeant major evokes many images: the steady, courageous leader whose very presence calms and settles his men on the eve of battle; the articulate, demanding senior NCO of the battalion who accepts only the highest standards of appearance, performance, and training; the experienced senior leader who always seems to have the answer or knows where to get it; and the ever-present embodiment of higher level commanders whose ability to communicate directly with line troops is so often taken for granted.

The roots of the sergeant major rank extend far back into history. As early as the

sixteenth century the English Army had sergeants major. The title disappeared for a time, but after its reintroduction in the eighteenth century the rank of sergeant major became almost legendary for its association with the senior enlisted position of respect, power, and responsibility. Sergeants major directly commanded troops and saw to the drill, discipline, and administration of their regiments.<sup>1</sup> Such individuals usually boasted years of experience in service around the world, a familiarity with all aspects of Army life, acquisition of command presence, and a demonstrated ability to lead troops in battle. As a group, their authority gave them great influence over the lives of the enlisted soldiers under them.

The United States Army first established the rank of sergeant major during the Revolutionary War, when Baron Frederick William von Steuben, a Prussian volunteer, spelled out the duties and instructions for the rank in his *Regulations for the Order and Discipline of the Troops of the United States* (1779). The regulations, covering all aspects of infantry, stressed NCO responsibility for care, discipline, and training of the troops in garrison and in the field. Von Steuben, as the man responsible for training the fledgling American Army, placed the sergeant major at the head of all NCOs, making him responsible for their conduct. His other duties included maintaining discipline, preparing rosters and details, and conducting parades.

During the next 150 years the number and placement of sergeants major periodically changed, but generally they were authorized in various branches at battalion level and above. In June 1920, however, a cost-conscious Congress grouped all enlisted soldiers into seven pay grades (E-1 through E-7) without regard to job or specialty. In the process, the position of sergeant major was eliminated, and master sergeant (“enlisted man of the first grade”) became the high-

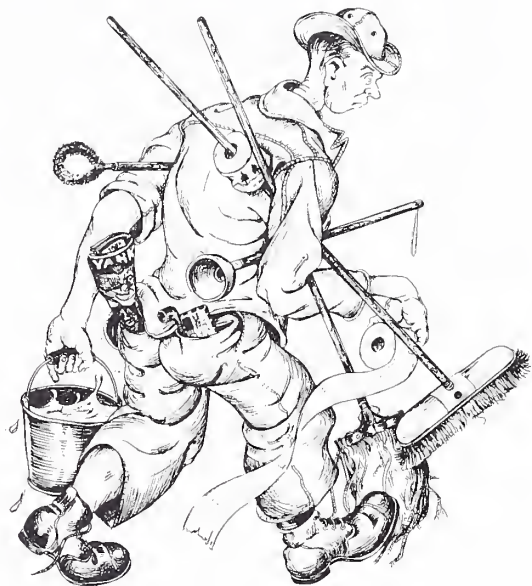
est NCO rank. For the next thirty-eight years the formal rank of sergeant major thus disappeared, with the position normally filled by the senior master sergeant in the organization. Finally, in June 1958 Congress made the first basic change to the enlisted grade structure since 1920, authorizing two new grades—first sergeant/master sergeant (E-8) and sergeant major (E-9). The grade of sergeant major ultimately returned as the highest level of enlisted service; in April 1959 the first NCOs were promoted into the newly created rank.<sup>2</sup>

### Sergeant Major of the Army: Origins

American noncommissioned officers have usually thought of themselves as professional soldiers because their skills are not easily acquired, and they share a sense of identity as leaders and trainers of the enlisted ranks. But for a variety of reasons, influenced by American military and political traditions and the patterns of our national history, the public and the Army leadership have been slow to recognize that professionalism.

Customarily, at the end of any war Congress has cut defense forces to the bone. The late nineteenth century and the 1930s were particularly painful examples of this trend. Each time this occurred, the NCO corps suffered from special problems: the nation dismissed its wartime skills as useless; some of its most experienced members left or were forced out of the service; its status was lowered; and its pay was cut. In addition to being ignored during peacetime, the noncommissioned officer corps often became the repository for excess officers during demobilization. Time and again, the NCOs were reminded that their status as career soldiers meant little.<sup>3</sup>

Even with the advent of the Cold War after World War II (1941–45), the American people were slow to recognize the need for a



“To get to the top, you must know what it’s like at the bottom.” “*Latrine Orderly*,” artist unknown.



continuing, adequately paid force to meet ever-present threats to their security. In fact, it was five years after the Korean War (1950–53), before Congress took the significant step of passing the Military Pay Bill of 1958, which created the E–8 and E–9 pay grades. Still, the financial and personnel pressures of a large standing army, stretched to every corner of the globe, made it extremely difficult to meet the personal needs and morale requirements of the enlisted soldiers. By late 1965, the Army leadership realized something beyond traditional methods and measures was necessary to bolster troop morale and increase the attractiveness of enlisted career opportunities.

A catalyst for action came in October 1965. At the conclusion of the Sergeants Major Personnel Conference, the Army's collective senior noncommissioned leadership recommended the establishment of the position of Sergeant Major, United States Army. During the previous year the leadership had referred the same recommendation to the Office of Personnel Operations (OPO), Deputy Chief of Staff for Personnel (DCSPER). Based on the earlier request, the DCSPER had initiated staff studies to design a program to meet the morale and motivational needs of the Army by opening an unprecedented direct channel of communication from enlisted soldiers of all ranks to the then Army Chief of Staff, General Harold K. Johnson. The Army leadership hoped that the program would promote confidence within the enlisted ranks and simultaneously increase the prestige, operating effectiveness, and career incentives for senior enlisted personnel. Detailed planning began with the analysis of a series of troop attitude studies, followed by the gathering of sergeants major from throughout the Army. Less than two weeks after the Sergeants Major Conference in October 1965, the OPO decided to recommend establishing the new office.<sup>4</sup>

General Johnson personally favored creating the position, believing that if “we were going to talk about the noncommissioned officers being the backbone of the Army there ought to be established a position that recognizes that this was in fact the case.”<sup>5</sup> In May 1957 the Commandant of the Marine Corps, General Randolph Pate, had established a precedent by creating the position of the Sergeant Major of the Marine Corps for much the same reasons.<sup>6</sup> As General Johnson contemplated instituting the position of Sergeant Major of the Army, however, some troubling considerations surrounding the new office needed to be addressed.

General Johnson considered the precise authority to be vested in the office. The SMA, as with sergeants major at any echelon, would not have any legal responsibilities or precisely defined roles. Without legal responsibility, General Johnson observed, you could not “provide the position with much authority.” On the other hand, a “sort of de facto responsibility” would arise from the position, as well as “an assumed authority.” This authority derived from the nature of the office and, more important, from the leadership and personality of the man occupying that office. The people below “would see [in the SMA] someone of substantial stature and consequently substantial authority.” In other words, their perceptions and expectations of the SMA provided his authority. This meant that the individual who became the Army's top NCO had to be a thoroughly experienced, energetic professional who would tend to take action on his own initiative as opportunities presented themselves. In this respect, establishing a tradition of activist sergeants major would be more important than any regulatory authority. Their actions and demeanor would enhance the office's authority even more.

The expected dynamic role of the SMA appointees created a second concern.



As the post would be an advisory position, not an alternate or parallel chain of command, the SMA would have to exercise great care to establish proper working relationships between his office and various Army staffs and agencies such as the OPO. In a broader sense, relations with the DCSPER, normally a three-star general, were even more critical "because the Sergeant Major of the Army is basically dealing with people" like the DCSPER.

The DCSPER was concerned that the SMA's office might interfere in the assignment function by creating an "old boy network" to circumvent DCSPER's decisions by arranging assignments and transfers outside of normal Army channels. To address this concern, General Johnson required every request for transfer received by the SMA's office to be handled only through DCSPER rather than, for example, through the Chief of Staff's office. General Johnson intended the Sergeant Major of the Army, like the sergeants major in units Army-wide, to remain an adviser and not become an operator as many in OPO feared. "What we created," General Johnson noted some years later, "was what might, for want of a better term, be called an ombudsman. He was a spokesman at the highest echelons of the uniformed side of the Army . . . to provide a recognition for the enlisted ranks."<sup>7</sup>

In 1966, while addressing the Sergeants Major Conference in Washington, D.C., General Johnson confronted the issue of a "dual chain of command," cautioning the Army's senior sergeants major against such a development. "But you have to be careful now," he warned, "that in this sergeants major chain you are not establishing some kind of an end run position, because this, if it ever developed and if it were then ever identified, would be the very quickest way to just torpedo the whole program."<sup>8</sup> Fortunately, it never happened.

Having decided to create the office, General Johnson then had to choose the man who would be the first Sergeant Major of the Army. He wrote a letter to each of the major commands describing his goals for the new office and soliciting suitable nominations for the position. All responded and General Johnson's personal staff placed the names in a matrix of different qualities and characteristics on a large spread sheet. After he reviewed them, his staff went back to the commands to obtain further information, to make additional checks, or to inquire about certain individuals. Although DCSPER was consulted "a little bit," as General Johnson put it, the Chief of Staff and his aides would make the decision. "There was," said General Johnson, "a good bit of exchange between my personal staff . . . people that you call aides normally."<sup>9</sup>

Of those nominated, only one was then serving in Vietnam, the single major command with American soldiers in combat during 1966. On some of his visits, General Johnson had seen Sgt. Maj. William O. Wooldridge of the 1st Infantry Division and considered him "a fine figure of a man." Sergeant Major Wooldridge, a 43-year-old soldier with twenty-five years' service, had spent sixteen years overseas. A highly decorated veteran of World War II and Vietnam, he had been awarded the Silver Star with Oak Leaf Cluster and the Legion of Merit with Oak Leaf Cluster, among others.

Although Wooldridge had had brushes with authorities early in his career, the Chief of Staff attributed them to the "exuberance of youth" and considered them an experience factor not necessarily incompatible with the responsibilities of the new position. Also, Johnson firmly believed that "once a man had paid the price you don't forever hold him to account . . . particularly where subsequent service has been exceptional in nature and so recognized."<sup>10</sup>

The decision was made. Wooldridge was General Johnson's man. Still, because of the great need that the first Sergeant Major of the Army be completely above reproach, the chief instructed his staff to make a thorough review of Wooldridge's background. General Johnson wanted an individual that "we can respect throughout the entire time he holds the position."<sup>11</sup> The extra efforts produced no new information. Although General Johnson later learned that there had been some ongoing investigations in Europe, the allegations later proved groundless.<sup>12</sup>

### The First Sergeant Major of the Army

General Orders No. 29, dated 4 July 1966, officially established the position of Sergeant Major of the Army, with tenure for the office corresponding to the tenure of the Chief of Staff whom he served. That same day General Johnson publicly announced the creation of the office.

On 11 July 1966, General Johnson administered the oath, officially making Sergeant Major Wooldridge the first Sergeant Major of the Army. Since no special rank insignia had yet been developed, Mrs. Wooldridge helped affix to the Sergeant Major's uniform a specially designed collar insignia, approved by General Johnson a week earlier, as a badge of the office (in the fall of 1978, the Army adopted a distinctive insignia of rank for the office).

Sergeant Major Wooldridge assumed his duties in an environment of upheaval and uncertainty. Little could anyone know that the Army was about to face some of the gravest challenges to leadership in its entire history. Years later, in 1984, renowned historian Russell Weigley would write that "no years since the foundation of the Army have matched the turbulence and the uncertainty

of purpose of the time since 1967."<sup>13</sup> For example, in mid-May 1966, just before Wooldridge assumed his duties, the draft failed to acquire enough soldiers who met the Army's physical and mental standards. Consequently, Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara announced "Project 100,000," allowing inductees with heretofore disqualifying Armed Forces Qualification Test scores to enter the Army. The decision obviously affected the overall quality of the force, necessitating more time for recruits to master Army skills and increasing the demands on NCO leadership.<sup>14</sup>

The need to sustain and expand the Army without a reserve component mobilization also put a heavy strain on the non-commissioned officer corps. In Vietnam and elsewhere, combat casualties and non-combat losses already had begun stretching thin the Army's mid-level noncommissioned officer grades. Promotions to staff sergeant and platoon sergeant came more rapidly than normal, resulting in inexperienced and less mature leadership. The problems of inexperience intensified in June 1967 when to meet critical shortages the Army began depending heavily on a wartime expedient of hastily trained junior noncommissioned officers, derisively called "shake and bake" NCOs, who often lacked the experience and judgment gained from the years such men would normally spend in the junior enlisted ranks.

In addition, the Vietnam War grew increasingly unpopular at home and within the Army itself. With many Army draftees questioning both its purpose and conduct, a polarization grew between the junior enlisted men (E-1 to E-5) and the professional noncommissioned officers.<sup>15</sup> Even in the latter ranks many began to question the repeated tours in Vietnam and to reflect the frustration with the perceived absence of any clear objectives.

While the Vietnam War raged, the U.S. armed forces also continued to shoulder the major military burdens of the Cold War for the entire free world. In both the United States and Europe, the chronic shortage of experienced NCOs soon forced company grade officers to deal directly with enlisted men. When the available NCOs were bypassed, their role as small unit leaders eroded. The morale of the noncommissioned officer corps plummeted at a time when the Army most needed their skills and strengths. From 1968 to the mid-1970s, junior officer and NCO leadership was a great concern to the senior Army leaders. Years later, Wooldridge himself stated that one of the greatest challenges facing the Army during his tenure was “poor officer and NCO leadership.” Both the prestige of the noncommissioned officer corps and expectations of what it could and should do needed major improvement.

In this environment, Sergeant Major Wooldridge energetically assumed his duties. As the first man to hold the office, he faced the awkward and difficult challenges of establishing ground rules and setting precedents for the future. He had no example to look back upon for guidance. There was no predecessor with whom he could consult. By his own account, the greatest challenge that General Johnson’s appointment presented him was thus the establishment of the position itself.<sup>16</sup> In this effort, he had only his years of military experience and the personal confidence of General Johnson to guide him.

General Johnson’s original letter seeking SMA nominations had devoted a full page to the duties and functions of the office. But when Sergeant Major Wooldridge reported for duty, General Johnson provided him with no more than an informal note card on which the following tasks were typed:

Will identify problems affecting enlisted personnel and recommend appropriate solutions. He will advise on the initiation of and content of plans for

the professional education, growth, and advancement of non-commissioned officers, individually and collectively. He will advise the Chief of Staff on all matters pertaining primarily to enlisted personnel, including but not limited to morale, welfare, training, clothing, insignia, equipment, pay and allowances, customs and courtesies of the service, enlistment and reenlistment, discipline and promotion policies. He will be available to provide advice to any board or commission dealing with enlisted personnel matters.

Wooldridge folded the card and carried it in his wallet. Those were the only written instructions he received during his tenure.<sup>17</sup>

With his own staff—a Women’s Army Corps secretary and a sergeant, first class, principal assistant—Wooldridge went to work as General Johnson’s senior enlisted adviser and consultant on all matters concerning enlisted personnel. When General Johnson told him, “We’ll give you a couple of weeks for the honors and ceremonies and then you can put on your fatigues and get to work,” he meant it. In the remaining days of July after the swearing-in ceremonies, Wooldridge and his staff handled about 300 disparate inquiries as they slowly began to define the new post.<sup>18</sup>

During his first six months Wooldridge had an intensive schedule of planned activities, as the Army touted and publicized the newly created position, with an emphasis on visits to build rapport with troops in the field. He made weekly trips to Army posts and hospitals in the United States and spent Christmas with Army units in Vietnam. At the end of his first year in office he had traveled nearly 160,000 miles, visited twenty-five continental United States (CONUS) installations, and made four trips to Vietnam and two to Europe. In the course of those trips he also went to Korea, Thailand, and Hawaii. He visited with individual soldiers, observed their training and combat operations, and met with their senior enlisted leaders to discuss various areas affecting morale and welfare. Back in his Pentagon office (whenever



he was there—he was in the field 50 percent of the time) he averaged 300 letters, 50 visitors, and 250 phone calls each month.<sup>19</sup>

About three months after becoming Sergeant Major of the Army, Wooldridge began to clarify what he wanted to accomplish. One item was *not* on his list. Echoing the admonitions of General Johnson, he was determined to avoid having his position in any way become a substitute for the chain of command. “I was not brought to Washington as a one-man replacement for the platoon sergeants, first sergeants, and unit sergeants major. Nothing that the Sergeant Major of the Army is slated to do will in any way take the place of the traditional responsibilities of these noncommissioned officers as the leaders closest to the individual soldier and the leaders responsible to unit commanders.”<sup>20</sup>

His first priority was to develop a more regular information-gathering system upon which to base future plans and recommendations. As a start, he wanted an annual Command Sergeants Major Conference to serve as a sounding board for ideas from all elements of the Army. In addition, Wooldridge planned to meet with noncommissioned officers in other forums, such as the annual conference of the Association of the United States Army (AUSA), and to broaden his contacts among the retired and reserve component NCO community. Johnson approved both initiatives.

Wooldridge’s second major area of concern was the enlisted insignia system. Like anyone else, he had developed some pretty clear ideas regarding the matter during his years as a soldier, and wanted to combine them with the opinions of other enlisted soldiers and make some concrete recommendations for change.

Third, he wanted to use his office to assist soldiers with personal and family problems. He intended to establish close

contact with service and civilian organizations that extended aid to men in need, such as the Army Emergency Relief and the American Red Cross, as well as with other agencies which focused on nonemergency morale support, such as the United Services Organization, the Army Special Services, and various veterans organizations. He believed that the conditions imposed by the ongoing war in Vietnam made such initiatives imperative.

Finally, he intended to participate and advise Army boards and commissions which had a direct bearing on the enlisted force. To be of assistance in this capacity, he planned to reinforce his twenty-five years of experience with frequent visits to soldiers in the field during which he could focus on the topics under discussion at higher levels.<sup>21</sup>

After assuming his duties, Wooldridge often traveled with the Chief of Staff. Normally the new SMA would convey the chief’s greeting to the enlisted personnel of the units they visited and sound out noncommissioned officers and enlisted men on matters that were troubling them. General Johnson observed: “Lots of times the problems didn’t make their way up [the chain of command] as rapidly or as clearly as they might. Sometimes you thought you had a problem on your hands and you didn’t, and other times you thought everything was fine and it wasn’t.”<sup>22</sup> The job of the SMA was to cut through those types of problems. Wooldridge also traveled with President Lyndon B. Johnson, both men undoubtedly hoping that the unique prestige and prominence of the other’s position would reflect on his own. Press relations, or “PR,” was important to the new SMA office from the beginning.

Very quickly, however, the Chief of Staff realized that tying Wooldridge’s travel too closely to his own was somewhat self-defeating. Since the Sergeant Major of the

Army's office was created to provide another avenue of communication with the troops, General Johnson believed it valuable to differentiate their itineraries to the field. The Sergeant Major of the Army thus received wide latitude in establishing his own travel schedule, with the chief approving where he went on a personal, informal basis.<sup>23</sup>

Soon Sergeant Major Wooldridge had blanket travel orders with complete freedom to visit where he thought fit without checking with anyone. He quickly developed an effective routine. After arriving at a base and paying a short courtesy call to the commander, he spent most of his time visiting mess halls, supply rooms, and other areas of the installation accompanied by the post sergeant major. Later they visited training venues and often had a social function in the evening. At training posts, the SMA spent the entire day with the trainees, eating with them, firing on the range with them, or participating in their training. Whether at a divisional or a training post, whether observing training or attending a social function, he talked to the soldiers and the noncommissioned officers to find out what was on their minds so he could carry the message back to the Army Chief of Staff.<sup>24</sup>

It was not long before the enlisted soldiers knew not only that the Sergeant Major of the Army existed, but also precisely what he was supposed to do. One day Wooldridge received a letter from a young private serving in Europe. The young man began: "I understand you are my representative at the Department of the Army. Here is my problem and I want you to please do something about it." The very next day Wooldridge received another letter from the same young soldier that read, "I wrote to you yesterday about my problem and I haven't heard anything yet. I want to know what you are doing about it."<sup>25</sup> Although he could not act as swiftly as the impatient soldier in Europe

wanted, the Sergeant Major of the Army, as the advocate for the enlisted man with unfettered access to the chief, was certainly able to provide previously unavailable assistance and service.

Sergeant Major Wooldridge experienced an incident which well illustrated another important role of the Sergeant Major of the Army. He received a call from Congressman Charles E. Bennett of Florida on 18 December. One of the congressman's constituents had a son serving in the 8th Infantry Division in Europe. Although the young man was supposed to be home for Christmas, he had been "bumped off" the Military Airlift Command plane at Frankfurt by a higher priority passenger. Was there anything Wooldridge could do? Wooldridge immediately called Sgt. Maj. Ken Koon of U.S. Army, Europe, in Heidelberg, Germany, requesting that he pick up the soldier and put him on a plane for the United States as soon as possible. The next day Sergeant Major Koon called from the Frankfurt airport to inform Wooldridge that the plane with the soldier on it had just taken off. The soldier made it home by Christmas to spend the holiday with his family, and the Army had gained the goodwill of all concerned.

When he learned of the incident, General Johnson was pleased. The task of the SMA office, he acknowledged, was to take advantage of the informal chain of communication that sergeants major have at their disposal. Wooldridge himself later wryly noted that if they had had to rely on the normal bureaucratic channels, "that soldier would have been lucky to be home by New Year's."<sup>26</sup>

General Orders No. 29, which established the position of Sergeant Major of the Army, set the tenure of the office to correspond to that of the Chief of Staff whom he serves. When General Johnson relinquished

his duties on 2 July 1968, after four years as the Army Chief of Staff, it was time to find a replacement for Wooldridge, even though he had been in the position only two years and, in the judgment of General Johnson, had done a "splendid job."<sup>27</sup> The new Chief of Staff, General William C. Westmoreland, asked Wooldridge to stay on as Sergeant Major of the Army. However, because of his desire to return to Vietnam and the understanding he had with General Johnson that they would both depart at the same time, Wooldridge declined the offer. He did, however, remain in office until August to provide continuity for the incoming Chief of Staff.<sup>28</sup>

Although he had served as Sergeant Major of the Army for just over two years, Wooldridge still had made many significant accomplishments. Perhaps his greatest was to fulfill the single mission which General Johnson gave him: to establish the Office of Sergeant Major of the Army. He and General Johnson had laid the foundation for how future SMAs would work with their Chiefs of Staff. They had carved out a highly visible position on the chief's personal staff with easy, direct access to the Army's top soldier. His presence with the chief on inspection trips enhanced the SMA's prestige and signaled the importance the Army placed on the senior representative of enlisted personnel. Wooldridge set his own schedule and traveled widely, thereby effectively providing the "eyes and ears," the informal, direct communication link, to the soldiers in the field that General Johnson had envisioned. Wooldridge had established invaluable relationships with various staff agencies in the Pentagon to coordinate on matters related to enlisted personnel. Soon after General Johnson retired, Wooldridge left office, affirming the system General Johnson envisioned that limited the Sergeant Major of the Army's tenure to that of the man who selected him, thus permitting each Chief of Staff to choose his own

Sergeant Major. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, Wooldridge gained the trust and confidence of a substantial body of enlisted men in the Army and became an actual ombudsman for the enlisted personnel. Most senior noncommissioned officers regarded the creation of the Office of Sergeant Major of the Army as "one of the finest things that had happened to the noncommissioned officer corps in recent memory."<sup>29</sup>

Wooldridge also established the annual Command Sergeants Major Conference. Soon after taking office in July 1966, Wooldridge had recommended that command sergeants major accompany their respective commanders to the annual Army Commanders' Conference in Washington, D.C. This would give Wooldridge an opportunity to discuss matters related to enlisted personnel with the CSMs, concurrently with the commanders' meeting. General Johnson agreed, and in November 1966 twenty-one sergeants major from commands around the world met at the first annual Command Sergeants Major Conference. As yet another vehicle for soliciting the enlisted viewpoint directly from the field, the conference proved extremely useful and has continued to the present.<sup>30</sup>

From the sergeants major conferences in 1966 and 1967 came proposals to change virtually every area affecting enlisted soldiers, especially specific recommendations to improve professionalism and career opportunities within the enlisted force. Among the approved recommendations was a centralized system, put into effect in 1969, for temporary promotions to the top two NCO grades. The new system generally reflected the one used to promote officers to field grade rank by eliminating the requirement for a position vacancy in an individual's current unit of assignment as a prerequisite for promotion. The result was a more equitable and uniform procedure for the



selection and promotion to master sergeant and sergeant major. Also, for the first time in Army history, selections and orders for the senior NCOs would be prepared at the Department of the Army level. Wooldridge considered this reform, along with centralized assignments, one of the greatest Army accomplishments during his tenure "because it broke up the old unit promotion system, opening up vacancies in the Army for all eligible NCOs."<sup>31</sup> It also went far to eliminate the necessity for an NCO to be at the right place at the right time to be promoted.

The conference recommendations prompted other changes. One was an Army-wide standardized promotion scoring system, which allowed competing enlisted personnel to compare their individual standings with their peers. Another was a standardized enlisted insignia of grade as well as an authorized miniature pin-on insignia of rank for fatigues and other utility uniforms. The latter, perhaps insignificant to outsiders, eliminated the tedium of sewing stripe changes onto multiple uniforms. Based on other conference recommendations, the Army also upgraded the company clerk position from E-4 to E-5, allowing more experienced personnel in the orderly rooms and cutting down on frequent personnel turnovers.

Such reforms succeeded because the Sergeant Major of the Army supported them. With his higher profile, he articulated the concerns of the enlisted ranks and surfaced the issues that the rank and file believed deserved consideration by various Army staff agencies.<sup>32</sup>

A third accomplishment during Wooldridge's tenure was the establishment of the command sergeant major rank, which he later called "the single most significant item to evolve from my term."<sup>33</sup> The issue had its roots in the Army's long-standing concern about the low prestige of its senior noncom-

missioned officers. The Military Pay Act of 1958 had established the grades of E-8 and E-9, an important step in improving the situation. The same concern had led General Johnson to establish the Office of Sergeant Major of the Army. Likewise, "greater prestige for the senior noncommissioned officer was the basis for . . . the establishment of the Command Sergeants Major program."<sup>34</sup>

In 1967 General Johnson conducted a records survey of sergeants major and found that those at corps and division level generally had combat arms specialties, outstanding commander evaluations, overseas experience in long and short tour areas, and a sincere desire to serve with troops. The profile of sergeants major above corps level, however, was "not so favorable" in his view. There, the survey found administrative specialists with limited combat and troop experience, many with extended overseas service in favorable long tour areas, and "some who [were] motivated more by the opportunity to 'homestead' in an area of their choice than by the challenge of serving with troops." Johnson believed that a strong sergeant major chain required individuals in key positions who were "vigorous, broadly experienced, and dedicated professionals who are more at home in the field with troops than at a desk in a major headquarters," rather than "figure-heads and administrative specialists."<sup>35</sup>

The Command Sergeant Major Program, which the Office of Personnel Operations proposed in June 1967, was an initiative to remedy the situation. At a late afternoon meeting in his office on 13 July 1967, General Johnson approved the new policy, adding that since command sergeants major constitute the "general officers" of the NCO corps, they would be treated as general officers with Headquarters, Department of the Army (HQDA), handling their selection, assignment, and career management. Command sergeants major would fill senior

enlisted positions on staffs of commanders from battalion level to HQDA.<sup>36</sup>

At the meeting the Chief of Staff also directed that the command sergeant major insignia be changed to make them more readily identifiable. The existing sergeant major rank had a star with three chevrons above and three rockers below. The star would have to remain on the insignia, but some simple change such as adding a wreath around the star might suffice to adequately differentiate the CSM from the standard sergeant major. The design evolved as the Chief of Staff suggested, and in March 1968 General Johnson presented the first new rank insignia—a star inside a wreath with three chevrons above and three rockers below—to Wooldridge.

The selection board for the first group of CSMs adjourned on 29 December 1967. Department of the Army Circular 611-31, dated 8 January 1968, listed the first 192 selectees for command sergeant major, including Wooldridge. Also on the list were the men who would be the next four incumbents of that office: George W. Dunaway, Silas L. Copeland, Leon L. Van Autreve, and William G. Bainbridge.

### Crisis and Confirmation

General Westmoreland became the new Army Chief of Staff on 3 July 1968. To choose his new Sergeant Major of the Army, Westmoreland, like Johnson before him, solicited nominations from the field. After a board had narrowed down a final list, he selected George W. Dunaway, then serving in Vietnam as command sergeant major for the 101st Airborne Division. With the choice warmly seconded by Wooldridge, the Department of the Army announced the appointment on 16 July 1968.<sup>37</sup> While Wooldridge reported back to Vietnam as the command sergeant major of the Military

Assistance Command, Vietnam (MACV), the new Sergeant Major of the Army, George W. Dunaway, was sworn in by General Westmoreland on 1 September.<sup>38</sup>

Although Sergeant Major of the Army for only two years, 1968–70, Dunaway witnessed pivotal changes in the Army. In Vietnam, the Tet offensive in February 1968 became a political turning point. The surprise Communist offensive shocked the American public and America's political leadership. Militarily the offensive was a failure, but psychologically it proved an enemy victory, encouraging those opposed to the war and demoralizing those who supported it. Political decisions soon followed, placing the United States on a course to end its involvement in Southeast Asia. Although the U.S. military presence in Vietnam peaked at 550,000 in early 1969, under the Nixon administration's Vietnamization policy it decreased to 475,000 by year's end and to 335,000 by the end of 1970.<sup>39</sup>

Domestic opposition to the Army in general and the war in particular peaked in May 1970 when Ohio National Guardsmen shot and killed four student protestors at Kent State University. Antiwar protestors and other groups organized a nationwide war demonstration, called the moratorium, to march on Washington, D.C., in October. Much of the animosity over the war was directed at the military, not surprising since U.S. local and national political leaders looked to state and federal military forces to contain such demonstrations.

Within the Army, dissension, opposition, and signs of ill-discipline increased. Racial antagonisms grew. Drug use became rampant. Desertion and absences without leave skyrocketed, while respect for authority and soldierly deportment declined. The Army was a reflection of the society it served and suffered some of the same ills. Moreover, serious misdeeds within

the Army, such as the My Lai massacre in Vietnam and mismanagement of open mess clubs in various locations worldwide, required extensive investigations. All these incidents received substantial media attention. The Army thus found itself a convenient target for the increasing number of Americans dissatisfied with the political leadership, the seemingly endless war in Vietnam, and the ruinous economic inflation.

An immediate concern for Sergeant Major of the Army Dunaway was to preserve the gains Wooldridge had made in establishing the Office of Sergeant Major of the Army and to protect it from its detractors. From the beginning, not everyone had accepted the position. General Johnson himself, in a 1972 interview, without naming specific individuals, talked about “people who resisted the creation of the position.” SMA Wooldridge, after his retirement, noted that he reported directly to the Chief of Staff and submitted papers and recommendations to him directly, “due in some part to the opposition of the Vice Chief of Staff and the principal staff opposing [Johnson] on his determination to have an SMA position.”<sup>40</sup>

A seemingly trivial issue, the location of the Sergeant Major of the Army’s office in the Pentagon had stepped on toes and made enemies. When General Johnson directed establishment of the position, he tasked the DCSPER to make all necessary preparations. As the date neared for Wooldridge to assume his duties, General Johnson learned that DCSPER had set up an office for the SMA within the OPO in the basement of the Pentagon.

Johnson quickly understood the implications of a basement office and told DCSPER to put the SMA within the Office of the Chief of Staff of the Army (OCSA), where immediate access was possible. He viewed the new office as similar to the role of a sergeant major at battalion or division

level, where the proximity and easy access made it possible for the Chief of Staff to quickly consult with his senior enlisted adviser. General Johnson made it clear that he wanted to see his Sergeant Major routinely and often.

There was no vacant space in the OCSA area of the Pentagon, where space was always a premium and vigorously defended commodity. The area selected for the SMA was directly across the hall from the Chief of Staff’s receptionist. Since the space was already occupied, everything on that side of the hall had to move left or right and jam in a little tighter to make room. According to Dunaway, “virtually everyone on that side of the hall in the 600 block of the ‘E’ ring lost space. There was a noticeable degree of resentment, especially among the senior colonels and general officers who, understandably, resented losing space to an enlisted man and an enlisted staff. These were people who had been battalion, brigade, division, and perhaps even corps commanders, and they did not like any of their turf being invaded by any enlisted man.” The problems of resentment were compounded when General Westmoreland accorded Sergeant Major of the Army Dunaway four-star protocol status.<sup>41</sup>

Finally, outside matters totally unrelated to the Sergeant Major of the Army provided ammunition for enemies of the office. In 1969 the name William O. Wooldridge surfaced in allegations stemming from open mess club investigations.<sup>42</sup> Media publicity and innuendo pushed presumptions of innocence aside and provided fuel for opponents of the Sergeant Major of the Army office to level attacks and push for elimination of the position.<sup>43</sup>

For the first Sergeant Major of the Army, it had been an uphill battle, as with any newly established agency, but Wooldridge had worked hard to establish himself and the office. His legacy was a



series of excellent working relationships with military and civilian personnel within the various general and special DA staffs. For Dunaway, some of those contacts remained open and friendly to him, while others simply vanished as though they had never existed. Dunaway recalled that when he assumed his duties as the second SMA, "the resentment was like a lingering, low-hanging cloud." Whenever he or his staff had to coordinate official or unofficial matters within OCSA, people within offices cooperated, but often with obvious reluctance and foot-dragging.<sup>44</sup>

With time, Dunaway and his staff were able to reopen many of the doors through personal contacts. But some remained closed and only the backing of the Secretary of the General Staff (SGS), the Vice Chief of Staff, or the Chief of Staff himself could force them open. Generally, Brig. Gen. William A. Knowlton, the SGS, could provide the requisite muscle, but on several occasions Dunaway had to invoke the support of General Bruce Palmer, Jr., the Vice Chief of Staff, to budge more powerful senior officers. At least twice Dunaway had to take delicate matters directly to General Westmoreland for resolution.

Within a year after assuming his duties, Dunaway made clear his priorities as the Sergeant Major of the Army. In an October 1969 *Army* magazine article, Dunaway hammered away at the need for renewed professionalism on the part of the NCO corps. Harkening to the time not long before, when noncommissioned officers were considered to be on duty twenty-four hours a day and were the backbone of the Army, Sergeant Major Dunaway praised the NCOs of earlier days who knew every detail of their post, and made on-the-spot corrections of incidents of misconduct and uniform violations on or off post. "The soldier knew that any sergeant he encountered

would correct him if he needed it, and a sergeant didn't dare let a superior catch one of his men in a situation which needed correcting."<sup>45</sup> This sort of work had once helped make the Army a respected institution.

Unfortunately, lamented the new Sergeant Major of the Army, by the late 1960s, despite "no written directive which discontinued this practice," it seemed "to have fallen by the wayside." Dunaway called for the noncommissioned officer corps to reestablish the level of discipline and professionalism perceived in previous eras. "A disciplined soldier is a well-dressed, sharp looking soldier, and represents his country in the highest tradition. I would like to see a concerted effort, fully supported by all enlisted men in the U.S. Army, to return to the true meaning of the old saying that 'NCOs are the backbone of the Army.'"<sup>46</sup>

His concerns meshed well with several current initiatives. In November 1968, the Army had approved a new enlisted personnel career program. Awkwardly titled the Management of Enlisted Careerists, Centrally Administered (MECCA), it sought to provide career management for professional enlisted soldiers and to ensure competitive individual professional development through assignments, education, promotion, classification, evaluation, and quality control. In 1969 the Army launched the program which would be executed in three phases over several years, eventually to include all soldiers in the grades E-5 and above. The first phase, scheduled for early 1970, initiated career management operations for grades E-8 and E-9. The second phase included grade E-7, and the final phase would incorporate grades E-5 and E-6.

The MECCA attempted to allow each career soldier to develop to the highest level possible, commensurate with ability and determination. Insofar as possible, the program sought to remove chance and

favoritism as career determinants. Key elements included coordinated programs of progressive assignments, selection for schooling, military occupational specialty (MOS) classification, performance evaluation, and selection for promotion. Under its provisions, an Enlisted Personnel Directorate of the Office of Personnel Operations, within DCSPER, actively managed career soldiers by selecting them for schooling and assignments, maintaining their DA management files, and advising them of their progress and standing among their peers. The underlying philosophy was to assign each individual to positions of increasing responsibility, with career patterns guiding the manager in the selections, in a manner similar to the officer professional development program.<sup>47</sup>

Centralized promotion to grades E-8 and E-9, a key feature of the program, began in January 1969. By October the Army staff was also developing a new, more comprehensive, and rigorous enlisted evaluation report to support the career management effort. Simultaneously it studied and published other forms and records systems to guarantee the greatest accuracy and dependability possible for promotions. Heretofore promotions had been done locally, based on locally maintained and updated records. But on 1 June 1970, HQDA assumed control of selections for promotion to grade E-7 and chose candidates from its first list that October.

The second significant program approved during Dunaway's incumbency as Sergeant Major of the Army concerned non-commissioned officer education. In 1969 the Army Chief of Staff approved the Noncommissioned Officer Education System (NCOES), a graduated system of military education. When completely implemented the program would consist of three progressive levels of formal instruction.

At the first level, the basic noncommissioned officer courses trained selected



*"Ready, Set, Go!"* by Brian Fairchild.



enlisted men in the grade of E-4 and lower for assignment, duty, and responsibility as company-level NCOs in the grades of E-5 and E-6. Instructional materials and facilities already existed because the offerings were nearly identical to the then current skill development base (SDB) courses. Training was differentiated by MOS and qualified the graduates to lead soldiers in a similar MOS or career group. Instruction emphasized basic leadership skills, knowledge, and attitudes required to effectively command enlisted personnel as fire team leader, squad leader, and comparable positions of leadership.

At the next level, advanced noncommissioned officer courses trained selected staff sergeants and sergeants, first class, to perform duties in the two highest enlisted grades. This branch-oriented training emphasized the philosophy underlying Army objectives and systems.

The final level was the senior noncommissioned officer courses, where selected master sergeants received training for duty as sergeants major of higher headquarters of the Army, or of a joint or combined headquarters. Sergeant Major of the Army Dunaway helped push through the NCOES program, but his successors had to implement it beginning in 1971.<sup>48</sup>

By 1969, a myriad of factors such as opposition to the war in Vietnam, draft evasion, internal Army dissent, and racial issues increasingly undermined the Army's efforts to recruit new soldiers, retain those already on active duty, and maintain morale and esprit de corps while fighting a war. On 27 March President Richard M. Nixon created the Commission on an All-Volunteer Armed Force. In February 1970, the commission concluded that an all-volunteer force was both feasible and desirable. Two months later the president proposed to Congress that the nation move to an all-volunteer armed force.

Since the Army relied most heavily on the draft to meet its manpower needs, it immediately created a task group to study, develop, coordinate, and monitor actions designed to reduce reliance on the draft and simultaneously increase the attractiveness of military careers.<sup>49</sup> To many the task seemed doomed to failure, yet by the end of Dunaway's tour the Army was taking some tentative steps to develop programs and implement changes aimed at an all-volunteer force.<sup>50</sup>

Although he had served for thirty years in the Army, Dunaway's retirement came as somewhat a surprise. The Army originally had envisioned the SMA's serving concurrently with his respective Chief of Staff. But Wooldridge's two-year term, which coincided with the last two years of Johnson's tour as Army Chief of Staff, and Dunaway's retirement at thirty years' service, appeared to set a *de facto* limit of two years on the SMA's tenure. Dunaway himself thought a two-year tour best, ensuring a continual infusion of fresh ideas and vigor into the office. He used this argument to convince General Westmoreland to officially change the assignment length. Thus General Orders No. 34, dated 8 June 1970, limited the tenure of the Sergeant Major of the Army to two years, effective 1 September 1970.

At the same time, Dunaway also recommended that Westmoreland reform the ad hoc system of selecting the Sergeant Major of the Army. Instead of the chief choosing his SMA from a list of names solicited from commanders in the field, Dunaway suggested that a selection board, with a general officer presiding, choose nominees from which the Chief of Staff could select the Army senior enlisted adviser. As the slightly more formal process would involve more of the Army staff in the candidate's selection, broadening his base of support, Westmoreland agreed. Subsequently, an Army-wide message announced the appointment of a selection



board, composed of a lieutenant general as chairman, two colonels, two lieutenant colonels, and the incumbent Sergeant Major of the Army. One of the lieutenant colonels represented the command sergeant major career management section in the OPO.

The new selection process went according to plan. After receiving nominations from the field, the board screened the candidates, paying special attention to disciplinary records. No candidates with letters of reprimand, nonjudicial punishment (Articles 15), or courts-martial were to be considered. The board identified five or six superior candidates, who met with the Chief of Staff for a personal interview. Through this procedure, General Westmoreland selected Sergeant Major Silas L. Copeland to succeed Dunaway and become the third Sergeant Major of the Army.

A combat veteran of World War II and Korea, Copeland was then serving as the command sergeant major of the 4th Infantry Division in Vietnam. Like his predecessors, he came directly from a combat assignment in Vietnam; however, he would be the last. By the time he retired from the office on 30 June 1973, the United States had withdrawn all its troops from South Vietnam and ended its direct involvement in the war.

From the perspective of a professional soldier, the state of affairs in the nation and in the Army could not have been much grimmer than on 1 October 1970, when Sergeant Major of the Army Copeland sat at his new desk for the first time. The trauma of pending defeat in Asia reverberated throughout the Army. Eventually, the hasty U.S. withdrawal from South Vietnam and an inconclusive truce underlined failure. The military, already a lightning rod for antiwar and anti-establishment sentiments, received more unfavorable press from continuing revelations of the My Lai massacre, the alleged misconduct of service club operators, and

similar affairs. Furthermore, the Army was in the throes of its largest demobilization since World War II, while simultaneously trying to implement an all-volunteer Army totally weaned of reliance on conscription. Stability, strength of tradition, and certainty of conviction were replaced by institutional turmoil, eroding standards, ineffectual leadership at many levels, and uncertainty—especially uncertainty.

For Copeland, the fact that he worked for three different Army Chiefs of Staff during his two years and nine months as SMA only increased the turmoil within his own position. General Westmoreland retired in July 1972, twenty-one months after choosing Copeland for SMA. General Palmer served as acting Chief of Staff for three and a half months, after which General Creighton W. Abrams was chief for the final eight months of Copeland's duties.

Although two Sergeants Major of the Army had preceded him, Copeland initially did not appreciate the potential impact his new post could have on the Army. Just prior to his formal appointment, he had visited troops in Vietnam where the enlisted ranks had given him an overwhelmingly—to him, surprisingly—positive reception. There among the soldiers at war, even before he officially assumed his duties, he began to understand his role. The experience there convinced him that as a personal staff member of the OCSA with unhindered access to the chief himself, he could really influence critical decisions, challenge poorly developed staff policy proposals, and provide leadership and professional input to the highest levels of the Army to a degree he had never before imagined.

Copeland received his marching orders from General Westmoreland immediately following the swearing-in ceremony at the Pentagon. Once the two of them were alone in Westmoreland's office, the Chief of Staff

got right to the point. He looked Copeland in the eye and said, "You were chosen as Sergeant Major of the Army because you are Silas Copeland. We have studied you and we know everything about you from the word 'go.' Now don't you change that!" Westmoreland wanted his new enlisted adviser to be himself—to use his knowledge, his experience, his personality, and the way of operating he had developed over a long, successful military career. In short, Westmoreland relied on Copeland's instincts, honed over a career of service, to assist him in accomplishing the Army's goals. Emphasizing that Sergeant Major Copeland would play an important part in the shift from a traditional conscript army to a modern all-volunteer force, Westmoreland told him to visit as many soldiers as he could and talk to them, explaining the Army's new policies, soliciting their questions and concerns, and allaying their fears and uncertainties.<sup>51</sup>

Copeland faced formidable tasks. The unspoken challenge was of course to complete the work begun by Wooldridge and Dunaway, institutionalizing and strengthening the SMA's office. Despite the hard work of his predecessors, when Copeland took office rumors were rampant in senior NCO circles that the Army leadership was considering abolishing the office. Many years later even Copeland noted that at the beginning of his tenure he had "sensed that there were moves by certain people to downgrade the office, to make it look like a useless establishment . . . [which] served no useful purpose and contributed nothing to the Army."<sup>52</sup>

The signs of such bureaucratic in-fighting were readily apparent. Early in his tenure, for instance, Copeland learned that a colonel would rate his performance. Yet lieutenant generals and generals rated sergeants major in several subordinate commands. In fact, general officers had rated Copeland for years.

Positions of greater prestige and authority should have higher-ranking raters. Although being rated by a colonel would have little effect on Copeland's career, he could not accept the diminution in stature to the Office of Sergeant Major of the Army that would inevitably result. Rather than give in, he preferred reassignment. In the end the Army decided that the Sergeant Major of the Army would not be rated at all. Copeland's stand increased not only his own stature, but also that of the office itself. Only his strong stand averted the threat of turning the office into some insignificant administrative position that would eventually die a natural death.<sup>53</sup>

Copeland also took other steps to institutionalize the office so it could survive on its own merit instead of depending on the strength and personality of any one occupant. To project a positive image, he made special efforts to win the goodwill of commanders and officers in the field and show them that the Sergeant Major of the Army was a senior noncommissioned officer working with, supporting, and assisting other noncommissioned officers, not a "whistle blower" or spy from the Pentagon. He wanted both officers and enlisted men to understand he was there to help in any way he could. At the same time he also put in long hours with the Army's public affairs office to help improve the public's impression of the Army.<sup>54</sup>

Sergeant Major of the Army Copeland's willingness to work hard, meet people, and discuss issues, together with his intuitive good sense, successfully preserved the office. Gradually, opponents of the office moved to new assignments, retired, or gave up their opposition. The office became a normal part of the bureaucratic structure as though it had always existed. When Copeland retired in 1973, the constant fight for survival was over. It became more a matter of developing the office's full potential to advise and counsel the Chief of Staff on enlisted matters.

In the larger world outside the Pentagon, Copeland's main challenge was to help move the Army to an all-volunteer force. When President Nixon directed the armed forces to become all-volunteer, the Secretary of Defense set 1 July 1973 as the "zero-draft" target date. In other words, if the Army could not attract sufficient recruits after July 1973, it would endure crippling vacancies and reduced efficiency. To assist, General Westmoreland wanted Copeland to work with the noncommissioned officers focusing on enlisted living conditions, career management, and professional development, toward the all-volunteer objective. The first involved modernized family and troop housing, improvements in health benefits, and increased pay; the second concentrated on more attractive enlistment options and the expansion of the recruiting service; and the third, professionalism, involved improved command stability, upgraded leadership instruction, and refined personnel management.<sup>55</sup>

In December 1970, the Chief of Staff announced a number of radical policy changes regarding the enlisted force. He banned all bed checks, eliminated the requirement to sign in and out of barracks, and did away with unnecessary formations and details. The Army's volunteer soldiers would be treated as professionals. At the same time, he established a five-day workweek as the normal routine whenever possible. In the same spirit, Army-hired civilians would henceforth perform normal kitchen police (KP) duties and popular short-order food service would be phased into mess halls around the world. In the barracks, the Army began renovations to provide more privacy and higher living standards for the troops. A modern Army had to keep pace with a changing society.

The Volunteer Army (VOLAR) experimentation and tests officially began on 4

January 1971, and eventually affected thirteen CONUS and three overseas posts. The program provided selected commanders with limited funds to explore new ways to attract and retain combat arms volunteers and raise living, working, and professional standards in their commands. On 30 June 1972, the VOLAR program was replaced by a more centralized experimental program that ended, in turn, one year later on the day Sergeant Major Copeland retired. Only after these two critical years of experimentation, 1970–72, did Army leaders finally agree to forge ahead with the programs and initiatives they felt would make the all-volunteer force a success.

Copeland was there for every agonizing minute as the Army tried to find direction in a very new world. His role was to help the noncommissioned officer cadre adjust to the tumult and change and "convince them that now is the time to take a close look at how we handle people."<sup>56</sup> Both articles he wrote for the annual October "Green Book" issue of *Army* magazine focused on leadership. He admonished members of the NCO corps to avoid passing blame or making excuses and to improve their leadership skills, especially in everyday garrison situations. The NCO, he urged, must return to the fundamentals of soldiering: "Know yourself, know your job, know your men. These are the basic principles of leadership; not new, but still valid." Copeland demanded more professionalism, high ethical standards, and increased communications between enlisted leaders.

Finally, in a concept that would be debated by leaders throughout the Army—seen as sacrilege by many—he stressed the need to answer the soldiers' perennial question "why?" "Whether it be a routine duty or a combat mission, the soldier wants to know why. The answer must be a credible one, and providing a credible answer is far from impossible. Meeting this challenge is one of the greatest needs in developing a





The Sergeants Major Academy, Fort Bliss, Texas.

professional Army, and is an essential for an effective NCO.”<sup>57</sup>

The post-Vietnam demobilization of the Army and the ensuing manpower reductions presented Copeland with another major challenge during his tenure, one that was often personally painful. Involuntary dismissals from the service presented a twofold problem for leaders like Copeland. Somehow, he had to explain why good soldiers with twelve or fourteen years’ service, who had served multiple tours in Vietnam and who had “won their battles, got their battle stars, Combat Infantryman’s Badge, Combat Medical Badge,” were being involuntarily separated from the service. Time and again he personally faced soldiers in his office who questioned the fairness and reminded him “I have a family, sergeant major.” Often the wives would call, hoping to touch the soft part of his heart. They did so, more often than they knew, but he was powerless to change things: “I had to try to explain to families, to parents, why, after we fought him for three years in Vietnam, we’re booting him out.”<sup>58</sup>

Copeland also had to face enlisted soldiers and noncommissioned officers in the field, who saw what was happening to their peers and understandably questioned their own future in a changing Army. After dealing face-to-face in his office with the personal tragedies resulting from the drawdown, Copeland thus found himself often traveling to the field, “ready to take some fire” from angry and concerned soldiers and NCOs. Both tasks he undoubtedly would have preferred avoiding. Maintaining the morale of the NCO corps and explaining the new policies were anything but easy during this period in the Army’s history.

Still, throughout this darkest time, Army leaders were planning a renaissance. During Copeland’s tenure the Army emphasized professionalism. Copeland personally stressed it in his writing, in his travel, and in his meet-



ings with the public. At the Army schools, training centers, and major commands, others emphasized professionalism with equal vigor to officers and enlisted alike.

The NCOES, approved during Dunaway's tour, took a more concrete form under Copeland. Under the guidance of Copeland and other Army leaders, the various schools adjusted and improved their basic-level courses. By June 1973, they offered training in forty-one MOSs, each supported by courses of eight to twelve weeks in length. Advanced-level courses began in the third quarter of Fiscal Year (FY) 1972 and were fully implemented within the next year, with forty-three courses of eight to twelve weeks. During FY 1973 more than 11,500 students entered basic courses, and 4,400 attended advanced courses. No one could quantify the contributions being made to noncommissioned officer professionalism, but the Army that emerged in the 1980s owed much of its excellence to an increasingly focused education system.

Most significantly, the Sergeants Major Academy at Fort Bliss, Texas, the pinnacle of the NCOES, opened its doors to the first class on 8 January 1973 with 105 students.<sup>59</sup> The academy was the source of special preparation for the Army's NCO elite. It was even more important in its contribution to the prestige of the NCO corps as a whole and in its symbolism of the Army's commitment to and emphasis upon NCO professionalism. Four academy graduates, William A. Connelly, Glen E. Morrell, Julius W. Gates, and Richard A. Kidd, would themselves become Sergeants Major of the Army, as would the academy's first command sergeant major, William G. Bainbridge.<sup>60</sup>

The significance of the NCOES, and the promise it held for the future professionalism and capability of the noncommissioned officer corps, is best understood by comparing the new system with the old. When the

first Sergeant Major of the Army, William O. Wooldridge, enlisted in 1940, the only schools available for NCOs were those set up to meet the requirements of a particular commander's unit. Formal education for NCOs was a hit-or-miss affair. Most learned their trade on the job, with all the rewards and failures of such an informal system. Wooldridge later related:

When 7th Army commander General Manton S. Eddy started a school for the first three graders in Munich, Germany [after World War II], I was a platoon sergeant. I went to my first sergeant and told him I wanted to attend the course. He asked me, "What for?" I told him I intended to stay in the Army and I intended to be something more than a rifle platoon sergeant. "But you're a combat veteran. You already know everything." I told the first sergeant that I knew platoon tactics. "You're wasting my time," he said. "Get out of my orderly room." In those days you just had to do it on your own.<sup>61</sup>

With the NCOES, NCOs no longer had to do everything by themselves. The institutionalization of noncommissioned officer education and training had become a reality.

During Copeland's time in office other changes further increased NCO professionalism. In 1972 the Army started a program to enhance the position of first sergeant by upgrading its status and prestige. Key elements of the program were stabilization of duty tours for first sergeants; priority consideration for family housing for the appointees; early attendance at advanced NCO schools for potential candidates; a change to the enlisted evaluation report to require specific comments on first sergeant potential for all staff sergeants through master sergeants; and priority consideration for first sergeant experience by all sergeant major boards.

Elsewhere, the Army changed the Enlisted Evaluation System by combining the efficiency report with occupational specialty evaluation test scores to measure overall performance. It also altered the effi-

ciency report by requiring annual submissions with rater comments on professional development and, as mentioned above, first sergeant potential.

By the conclusion of his tenure, Sergeant Major Copeland could note several major accomplishments, none of which had been easy. He had strengthened the Office of Sergeant Major of the Army; the Noncommissioned Officer Education System was up and running; and the first class had graduated from the new Sergeants Major Academy. There had also been a steady stream of changes in the enlisted acquisition, promotion, and training system as the Army moved along the road to an all-volunteer force. Copeland's proudest accomplishment, however, was "to influence the noncommissioned officer corps to alter their method of operating," persuading "noncommissioned officers to change their thinking and leading of troops; [and] to treat a human being as a human being, with dignity and respect."<sup>62</sup>

In September 1972, General Bruce Palmer, Jr., the acting Army Chief of Staff, extended Copeland's tenure as Sergeant Major of the Army by four months to allow him to serve in the office until his retirement with thirty years of service.<sup>63</sup> That same month, HQDA sent out a message announcing the formation of a nominating board to provide the Chief of Staff a list of names from which to choose the new Sergeant Major of the Army. The board would consist of a general officer as president and four senior field grade officers. The zone of consideration for nominees included all active Army command sergeants major except those who had applied for retirement at the time the board was to be convened.

In January 1973, one month before Copeland was to retire, General Creighton W. Abrams, then Army Chief of Staff, asked him to remain in his position as SMA through 30 June 1973, saying he thought it

was in the best interest of the Army. Ever the good soldier, Copeland graciously agreed. Finally, on 30 June 1973, after two years and nine months as Sergeant Major of the Army during a period of great upheaval and change, Copeland retired, turning over the reins to Leon L. Van Autreve on 1 July 1973.

Leaving his job as command sergeant major of U.S. Army, Alaska, Van Autreve became the first Sergeant Major of the Army to assume his duties from an assignment other than Vietnam, although he had previously served there for two years. He was also the first engineer selected for the job and, at 53 years of age, the oldest. Wooldridge had been 43 when he took his oath, Dunaway 46, and Copeland 50. Interestingly, Van Autreve was also the only foreign-born soldier appointed as SMA, his parents having immigrated to the United States from Belgium when he was a child. In many ways, his career represented the American dream: he was born in a foreign country, attended school there, and came to this country not able to speak English; yet through hard work, persistence, and talent, he reached the pinnacle of his profession.<sup>64</sup>

In selecting Van Autreve, General Abrams had one additional prerequisite, specifying that the new SMA be a married man. Although all previous incumbents had in fact been married, marriage had not been a formal qualification in any way. Abrams, however, thought it essential that the SMA serve as a social as well as a military model for the enlisted force. In a more practical sense, he hoped that the SMA's wife could periodically accompany her husband on trips to meet with the wives of enlisted personnel. In this way she could provide the Sergeant Major of the Army, and by extension the Chief of Staff, with insights into the problems and needs of enlisted men and their families that might not otherwise come to their attention.<sup>65</sup> Although a military force,

the Army had also always been a social institution in which family housing, education, health care, and general morale had been a communal responsibility.

Although the Army began its return to order and relative routine during 1973–75, it remained transitional, with many new ideas and programs being tested and implemented. Symbolic of the returning calm was the fact that Van Autreve's first year in office, July 1973–June 1974, was the first full year since 1965 that the Army was not at war. It was also the first year that the Army relied completely upon an all-volunteer system to procure personnel. When the last draftee left the Army on 22 November 1974, it was a 100 percent all-volunteer force for the first time since 1948.

The post-Vietnam Army increasingly emphasized the importance and role of its reserve components. Although its manpower strength was at its lowest since 1950, its global responsibilities had not diminished with the end of the Vietnam War. Faced with greatly reduced budgets and a fixed active duty strength of 780,000, the Army leadership had to meet the readiness demands with fewer resources. One response was to affiliate reserve units with active units and, through the affiliation program, forge common bonds among the active, reserve, and guard forces. A primary goal was to improve the ability of those reserve components most likely to be mobilized first in an emergency. More efficient organization and improved management in this area could provide substantial savings while strengthening the Army's overall fighting potential.<sup>66</sup>

During this period, the SMA still focused on and emphasized people, the "care and cleaning" of the ordinary soldiers. Improved quality in the noncommissioned officer corps meant better implementation of programs affecting people. "The quality of the noncommissioned offi-

cer corps," Van Autreve wrote, "determines in large measure the quality of the Army. Today, progress throughout the Army, and most especially in the programs that affect people, reflects an upsurge in quality among the noncommissioned officers." He likened the process to an inverted pyramid: the broad base of policies instituted at the top, with implementing policies and instructions from intervening headquarters weighed down on the small, pointed apex representing the unit. The entire weight focused on the NCOs in the companies, troops, batteries, platoons, squads, and sections that had to make the policies work. There, the noncommissioned officer played his most important role in the development and success of the Army.<sup>67</sup>

During the two years of Van Autreve's tour, Army-wide efforts thus continued toward building an increasingly professional NCO corps with an institutionalized administrative base to provide uniform training, continuous direction, and progressive growth for every soldier over the course of his career. The departure from a draftee-based Army presented several challenges to this effort. In moving to a smaller force of volunteers, the Army needed more broadly qualified soldiers to ease assignment and personnel management problems. During Van Autreve's first year in office, Army leaders thus decided to decrease the number of MOSs. They expected that broadening the remaining MOS fields would reduce mismatches between the soldier's designated job and what he was actually doing.

Another important development during Van Autreve's watch was the Enlisted Personnel Management System (EPMS). A smaller, all-volunteer Army forced the Army staff to reconsider its heretofore piecemeal personnel management programs. Policies governing promotion, MOS classification, testing, and evaluation all



affected a soldier's career pattern, advancement, and thereby his decision to choose the Army as a profession. Yet the various programs were often so separate, and sometimes even contradictory, that many soldiers were confused and discouraged at the seeming lack of direction in their careers. In 1973 General Abrams ordered the Military Personnel Center and the Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) to review the problems.

Their recommendations culminated in the EPMS, which provided clear patterns of career development and promotion potential for any length of service. It grouped career management fields into related MOSs and redesigned the fields to provide a logical, understandable road map to guide career-motivated soldiers along the most direct route to sergeant major. The system eliminated promotion bottlenecks and provided everyone a fair opportunity for advancement by further centralizing the promotions process. Steps in this direction had already been implemented.

The NCOES was one of the earliest programs to be taken over, integrated, and expanded under EPMS. Under the new system, branch schools developed training plans for each MOS with specific tasks, conditions, and standards. Periodically, soldiers were to verify their ability to perform MOS-related tasks through skill qualification testing (SQT). The entire process aimed to help soldiers advance to the next higher skill level, where they could be considered for promotion to higher grades.<sup>68</sup>

Approved in August 1974, the phased EPMS implementation began in January 1975 when the Department of the Army instructed field commands to change authorization documents to reclassify and convert personnel in certain redesigned career management fields. It took two and a half more years for EPMS to be in place throughout the

Army, but it was conceived, developed, and prepared for implementation during Van Autreve's tenure with his strong support.<sup>69</sup>

Sergeant Major of the Army Van Autreve also saw the Army take the first steps toward what was termed "one-station training." To lower costs and reduce turbulence during the training of new enlistees, the Army devoted considerable attention to the possibility of conducting all stages of most initial entry training at a single post. But Van Autreve was more concerned about the quality of soldiers being sent to the basic NCO courses. Units failed to sufficiently emphasize this preliminary leadership training, which resulted in serious shortfalls for each NCO class. In visits to the field and meetings with senior NCO leadership, he continually emphasized the need to send the best soldiers to these courses. Instead of holding back good soldiers because they were "indispensable" to upcoming unit training or activities, he insisted they be allowed to attend the classes. Units had to recognize the importance of basic course attendance for the individual soldier and for the Army as a whole.

In his travels and in his day-to-day duties, Van Autreve promoted the Army Chief of Staff's goals of improving the quality of the enlisted force, making the best use of limited resources, and shaping the Army for the future. Since Van Autreve, like his predecessors, was an adviser and counselor, not an action officer or initiator of policy, he could not unilaterally initiate or implement specific policies. But as the Chief of Staff's eyes and ears, he reviewed and shaped such policies. Like his predecessors, he remained the most visible spokesman for the enlisted community and the symbolic leader of the noncommissioned officer force.

His peers saw Sergeant Major Van Autreve as a "tough task master, a strictly

no-nonsense type who was trying to revitalize the noncommissioned officer corps and restore the lost faith of many noncommissioned officers in the Army.” As one contemporary put it, he “took the noncommissioned officer corps by the collar and shook some sense into [it] . . . for he has led us a mighty long way in the past year and a half.” Because of his leadership, many senior noncommissioned officers requested that Van Autreve’s tour as SMA be extended. General Frederick C. Weyand, who became the new Chief of Staff following General Abram’s untimely death in September 1974, declined the requests, deciding to uphold the two-year limitation on the Sergeant Major of the Army’s term of office.<sup>70</sup> Weyand agreed, however, as Van Autreve’s tour was ending in the spring of 1975, to make him a member of the next SMA selection board.

Van Autreve’s successor, Sergeant Major William G. Bainbridge, also brought a variety of Army experiences to the office. As an infantryman during World War II with the 106th Infantry Division, he had been captured when his unit was overrun during the Battle of the Bulge. Bainbridge knew the bitter taste of being a prisoner of war until liberated by members of the 6th Armored Division. Following his return to the United States in 1945, he left the Army to return to farming but was recalled to active duty in 1951 for the Korean War. Like others in similar circumstances, he then decided to make the Army a career. Bainbridge subsequently served in a variety of stateside and overseas assignments, including combat service in Vietnam. In 1972 he became the first command sergeant major of the newly formed Sergeants Major Academy.

Sergeant Major of the Army Bainbridge assumed his office on 1 July 1975; he would ultimately serve longer in that capacity than any of his predecessors.

The Chief of Staff, General Frederick C. Weyand, came to believe the two-year tenure for Sergeant Major of the Army was “unduly brief,” and took steps in June 1976 to change it to three years.<sup>71</sup> General Orders No. 14, dated 16 June 1976, officially made the tenure of the Sergeant Major of the Army three years, retroactive to 8 June. The next year General Orders No. 23, dated 15 November 1977, reaffirmed three years as “the normal tour for the Sergeant Major of the Army.” That same month, the new Chief of Staff, General Bernard W. Rogers, who had succeeded Weyand in October 1977, extended Bainbridge’s tour an additional year. Bainbridge had “earned the confidence, respect, and admiration of the Army’s leadership as well as its soldiers during service as the Army’s senior enlisted member.”

Practical measures as well as personal reasons extended Bainbridge’s tenure to four years, setting an important precedent for the future. From the beginning both the tenure of the appointment and its timing had been unsettled. Of the first five incumbents, two had served concurrently with the Chiefs of Staff who appointed them, but both had served just over two years. Two had their tenure set at two years, and the fifth lasted three years. Three took office in July, one in August, and one in October. The irregularities had always somewhat undermined the solidity of the office.

Bainbridge finally ended this situation with his four-year tour, paralleling that of the Chief of Staff, being followed since that date. Thereafter, Sergeants Major of the Army assumed their duties on 1 July, served four years with the Chief of Staff who appointed them, then retired from the office and the service. Thus Bainbridge’s tour also laid to rest the original concept of having the departing Sergeant Major of the Army return to duty elsewhere, as Wooldridge, for instance, had done. The SMA assignment

would fittingly be a pinnacle of achievement before retirement.

During Bainbridge's tenure, the Army faced major financial challenges. The volunteer Army proved expensive, and inflation and reduced budgets compounded the problem. Furthermore, the Army's desperate need to modernize its conventional forces also proved costly. During the war in Vietnam, the Army had paid for its heavy expenses in Southeast Asia in part by putting off the development and acquisition of new equipment. In sum, the high cost of raising, equipping, and maintaining an effective volunteer Army in the prevailing economic conditions, given the antimilitary mood of the Congress and the nation, presented serious obstacles.<sup>72</sup>

At first Army leaders opted to emphasize readiness and training. To ease personnel shortages, they recruited more women and gave them an expanded role in the military. Simultaneously, the Army continued to improve the quality of service life for the average soldier. Meanwhile, as existing equipment was upgraded as inexpensively as possible, the Army developed a five-year plan to deploy new tank, artillery, cargo helicopter, attack helicopter, and vehicle transport systems to prepare the forces for the 1980s. Finally, the Army focused on long-term sustainability, that is, upholding production planning agreements with private industry and maintaining the Army's investment in government-owned production facilities.

Army leaders also continued to emphasize what was now called the Total Army, the mixing of ready reserve and active component units. The Army added three combat divisions during 1975–79, without increasing active force manpower, by cutting active duty headquarters staffs and transferring many combat support and combat service support units to the reserve components. The Army also left some active duty divisions with only two of their three authorized brigades, sup-

plementing them with reserve component roundout combat brigades and battalions. These roundout units regularly trained with their affiliated active component unit, so they could fill out the division in time of war.<sup>73</sup>

Training emphasized tough and realistic preparation and execution. The Army used the opposition force concept, replicating likely enemy forces down to the use of tactics, weapons, and equipment. By 1979, plans were well under way for the new National Training Center, complete with an elite opposition force. Sited in the California desert, it would have the task of realistically training heavy combat battalions and brigades over vast maneuver areas for extended periods in near-real battlefield conditions.

Innovative change characterized the Army during the years 1975–79. Realistic training incorporated revised doctrine, reorganized force development, and new equipment. Although the second half of the decade seemed dark and foreboding, the Army that was to emerge in the mid-1980s would be a first-class, professional force, superbly trained and equipped with the best weapons in the world, a testimony to the hard work and intensive planning witnessed by this critical period.

Also during this time, the Office of Sergeant Major of the Army matured and gained increased acceptance and greater responsibility. In the final months of his tenure, Sergeant Major of the Army Bainbridge recalled: "Over these past . . . years I have seen this office move from a coordinating office with largely perfunctory and obligatory involvement into an integral element of the Army staff." Bainbridge's professionalism and vision had helped the process as he continually sought more responsibility. In response, the Secretary of the Army had made the Sergeant Major of the Army a member of the Army Policy Council, and the Chief of Staff had made



him a member of the Army Staff Council as well as the General Staff Council. The SMA took his rightful place at the table with the Army's other staff principals.<sup>74</sup>

Added exposure and increased interaction with the Army hierarchy increased the credibility and prestige of the office and made the Sergeant Major of the Army a sought-after person in bureaucratic policy-making decisions. Not only did the changes reinforce the Sergeant Major of the Army's existing access to both the Secretary of the Army and the Chief of Staff where enlisted matters were concerned, but they also prompted various staff agencies and action officers to seek him out for input and coordination regarding policies affecting the welfare of the enlisted force. Indeed, any action that would impact on enlisted personnel had to be coordinated with the Sergeant Major of the Army, who finally emerged as the accepted senior adviser and counsel on enlisted matters. His concurrence became essential before actions could be sent to the Chief of Staff.<sup>75</sup>

The Sergeant Major of the Army also gained exposure outside the Army. Often he was called upon to testify before congressional committees, particularly on matters pertaining to recruiting, training, retention, and quality of life for soldiers and their families. For example, Bainbridge testified in 1977 and 1979 on how training budget reductions affected the quality of personnel and on funding for lower-ranking enlisted soldiers to move their families overseas. His successors would continue the tradition, testifying repeatedly on the recruitment and retention of the enlisted force and on the general quality of life within the Army.<sup>76</sup>

In his role as Sergeant Major of the Army, Bainbridge personally emphasized increased responsibility, authority, and prestige for noncommissioned officers, and readiness through training, education, and

moral discipline. If the Army had to do "more with less," it still had to be prepared to fight and win the first battle of the next war against a numerically superior opponent. In his first *Army* magazine "status report" Bainbridge wrote, "A champion fighter wins because he outfights and outsmarts his opponent. The champion steels himself with total discipline—physically, mentally, and morally." He went on to emphasize the tough training needed to achieve high standards of professionalism and fighting skill.

While stressing the importance of civilian education in addition to the NCOES, he called upon the NCO corps to internalize the moral discipline that motivates men to do on their own what is right without prodding by others and to show "the personal courage to say 'no' when the crowd says 'yes.'" For Sergeant Major of the Army Bainbridge, moral courage was "an inner critic that refuses to tolerate less than your best." And, finally, as an ominous warning for those who chose to ignore his message, he reminded the noncommissioned officers that promotion boards search for stragglers as well as front-runners, and he would not tolerate mediocrity. "Your volunteer Army," he declared, "is not going to become a home-stead for mediocre performers with mediocre ambitions."<sup>77</sup> Subsequent articles over the next two years revisited the theme of preparation through training (NCOES, MOS retraining programs, and SQTs as part of EPMS) and the noncommissioned officer's role in this vital function.

During Bainbridge's watch, the Army completed and began fine tuning the Enlisted Personnel Management System. By March 1978 it had converted all enlisted career management and MOS fields to the new system, in the process reducing 36 enlisted career fields and 451 specialties to 30 fields and 345 specialties. An important element of the system, the skill qualification test, evaluated a

soldier's ability to perform the critical tasks required by his specialty at his current and the next higher grade. Bainbridge, however, also convinced Army leaders to retain a high school education as a criterion for promotion to staff sergeant.<sup>78</sup> Bainbridge also played a key role in developing the basic and primary NCO courses.<sup>79</sup>

Perhaps his greatest contribution lay in the moral leadership he provided to the NCO corps. His last status report in the 1978 *Army* magazine praised the soldiers of the Army, but again admonished NCOs for whining about officers taking away their authority and tying their hands. He wrote, "No officer ever took anything away from the noncommissioned officer. Rather, it was given away." He then added, "We have worked long and hard at restoring our officers' confidence in the corps of noncommissioned officers. Tomorrow's Army deserves this confidence to be maintained." He urged NCOs to develop and maintain personal pride—to be worthy of it, to maintain it, and to use it to enhance the prestige of the NCO corps as a whole, which would work to the advantage of each and every noncommissioned officer. He expressed his belief that the "single greatest contribution to our Army's improved condition can be directly traced to greater use of the NCO."<sup>80</sup>

The NCO corps and the Army were on the mend and markedly improved from six to eight years earlier. Gradually, a reborn Army was emerging from the chaos of the final Vietnam years. Bainbridge's emphasis and efforts during his four-year tenure played a major role in revitalizing the backbone of the Army, its NCO corps. General Bernard Rogers, General Weyand's successor in 1976, credited Bainbridge with doing more to improve the image and prestige of the NCO corps than any other soldier in recent times: "As the Army's senior enlisted man for the past four years, he has been the driving force

in vitalizing and reinforcing the prestige and authority of the NCO corps."<sup>81</sup>

## Stability and Growth

When the Sergeant Major of the Army position was established in 1966, it was a small but important part of a larger effort to professionalize the NCO corps. By 1979, the Office of Sergeant Major of the Army itself rested on a secure foundation, and many efforts to professionalize the NCO corps were in motion. The all-volunteer force was in place and making the necessary adjustments to improve rather than just survive. In the process, NCOs had gained more responsibility and prestige. Training had improved. Soldiers had improved. The Army itself had improved.

Despite a favorable prognosis, the Army still needed plenty of attention before it could have a clean bill of health. If the first five SMAs had been crucial in reviving the patient, their successors would have to concentrate on bringing his physical and mental health to a new peak. The cessation of war in Vietnam and the final fall of Saigon in 1975 had only seemed to heighten Cold War tensions while lesser crises in other areas seemed equally menacing.

Sergeant Major of the Army William A. Connelly was sworn in by the Chief of Staff, General Edward C. Meyer, on 2 July 1979. The first holder of the office to have graduated from the Sergeants Major Academy at Fort Bliss, Texas, Connelly had just been the command sergeant major at U.S. Army Forces Command, Fort McPherson, Georgia. He was also the first Sergeant Major of the Army to take office for the officially established three-year tenure.

By this point, use of a selection board to choose the new SMA was routine. In the case of Connelly, the process had begun in September 1978 when General Rogers made

the decision to change certain criteria for eligible candidates. He deleted the MOS test score requirement, since the Army had terminated CSM testing in 1975, and increased the required minimum enlisted service from twenty-four to twenty-six years. Although no policy prescribed the position as a terminal assignment, it had become one in practice.<sup>82</sup> Finally, he specified that SMA recommendations had to come from commanders in the grade of colonel or above, instead of lieutenant colonel as previously allowed. It seemed more appropriate to have a more experienced commander nominate candidates, considering the prestige of the office.<sup>83</sup>

The Army dispatched messages to the field in October 1978, announcing the new criteria and soliciting nominations. Five months later, in February 1979, a board consisting of a lieutenant general, three major generals, and the incumbent Sergeant Major of the Army selected thirty finalists. Then, after gathering further background on the selectees and their spouses, the board recommended five finalists. In April, after each had been thoroughly checked by investigative agencies, the board ranked them by order of merit for the Chief of Staff, who interviewed them that same month and announced his decision.

When Connelly took office, the Army was in the process of several major reorganizations. Plans were under way to redesign combat units at division level and higher; ideas and concepts were coalescing for the dynamic AirLand battle doctrine that would replace the more passive "active defense." The Army was also moving steadily toward fielding exciting and potent new weapons and transportation systems for the mid-1980s. At the same time it was implementing revolutionary new training systems to enhance the preparedness of individual soldiers and their units. Higher standards were demanded Army-wide in virtually all areas.

In 1979 there were, of course, many problems, especially in the areas of personnel and recruitment. Nevertheless, the Army was moving in the right direction and the problems were not so widespread as to be overwhelming. For example, the Army had difficulty achieving recruiting goals in 1979–80, and the quality of recruits was not always as high as the small unit leaders would have liked. Yet this situation improved in a few short years, as a domestic economic downturn made the Army a competitive choice as a profession. By 1983 the active Army met both qualitative and quantitative recruitment and reenlistment goals.<sup>84</sup>

In retrospect, as Connelly came on board the Army was again changing—but this time it was a more controlled change, one in which Army leaders could provide better direction. It was a time of improvement rather than radical restructuring; a time to modernize and move to improved readiness and strength. The Army now emphasized quality through better training, equipment, and education.

The Chief of Staff gave Connelly a twofold mission in rather broad outlines. The first was in the tradition of the sergeant major and the established pattern of the Sergeant Major of the Army: Connelly was to serve as the eyes and ears of the Chief of Staff in matters concerning the enlisted personnel and "to provide open and frank advice and criticism" of what he saw in the field. Connelly's second responsibility, which the Chief of Staff gave as a mission-type order, was "to oversee the continued development of the NCO corps."<sup>85</sup>

Connelly had clear ideas about what he wanted to accomplish. In an interview with the *Army Times*, just three weeks after taking office, he said he had "about 10 . . . enlisted matters, including several dealing with promotions and assignments" that he wanted the Army staff to review. He refused to divulge



those matters until he had time to coordinate with the various staff agencies, but in that same interview he made clear one of his two main points of emphasis.

At the time, Congress was taking steps to reduce the number of military dependents overseas in long-tour areas such as Germany and Japan. Connelly strongly opposed such efforts, publicly saying that sending the families overseas with the soldiers was “as necessary to readiness as spare parts” because of its importance to discipline and morale.<sup>86</sup> Taking care of soldiers and issues related to soldiers became a major focus of Connelly’s four-year tour. Although the previous Sergeants Major of the Army had similar concerns, they had been forced to concentrate on more pressing issues, such as establishing the office, downsizing the Army, implementing the all-volunteer Army, and helping set in place programs to professionalize the NCO corps. Progress in these other areas allowed Connelly more time and energy for the basic enlisted soldier.

A second concern of Connelly, as highlighted in his *Army* magazine “Status of the Army” articles, was training. He wrote about it often and emphasized it greatly. Just three months after taking the job, he asserted that “Training is the number-one priority in today’s Army.”<sup>87</sup> The next year he reemphasized the point: “Our first priority as NCOs is to make sure the Army, the whole Army, is ready to go to war today, tomorrow or whenever challenged. For us it means leadership and hard work and it is spelled T-R-A-I-N-I-N-G.” He went on to encourage the noncommissioned officers to train their soldiers to tough, measurable standards; to standardize the practice of battle drills; to plan better; to “train smart” and share the load; to do a better job of focusing on what is important; and to do a better job of coaching subordinates when they conduct training.<sup>88</sup>

The next year he reiterated the same challenges. Although the Army had improved, he still emphasized the fundamentals of good soldiering that needed attention: get tough, take charge, and stop making excuses; be positive and stop griping; be disciplined and demand it from the soldiers. Finally, echoing the ideas Dunaway had expressed some years earlier, he wrote that NCOs needed to show professional courage and always correct the soldier who needs it.

By Connelly’s last year as Sergeant Major of the Army, the new equipment to modernize the Army during the 1980s was about to enter the units. Connelly insisted on technical competence and the need for NCOs to become personally and closely involved in the new equipment that they were responsible for maintaining. They needed to pass on that knowledge, along with their tactical and garrison expertise, to the soldiers as they trained them.<sup>89</sup>

During his tenure Connelly sponsored or encouraged a number of initiatives to improve the life of the soldier and his family. These included improved dependent travel entitlements for family members and soldiers during changes of station and improved burial entitlements for serving and former senior NCOs and other enlisted soldiers. Other programs and changes by Congress or the Army staff enhanced the financial rewards of a military career: dramatic pay increases, improved enlistment and reenlistment bonuses, and implementation of the Army College Fund (the Veterans Educational Assistance Program—a substitute for the old GI Bill). All contributed to attracting and retaining high-quality soldiers.<sup>90</sup>

Connelly also was instrumental in developing the Noncommissioned Officer Development Plan (NCODP). This program complemented the Enlisted Personnel Management System and mandated that commanders at all levels conduct NCO leadership

training within their units. NCO involvement with the execution of this training enabled them to put into practical application the skills acquired through EPMS and NCOES. In 1980 the Sergeant Major of the Army assumed responsibility for overseeing noncommissioned officer professional development throughout the Army's major commands, the National Guard, and the Army Reserve as part of the newly established program.<sup>91</sup>

Sergeant Major of the Army Connelly also began the drive that eventually led to the elimination of the "specialist" ranks above E-4. To Connelly, the specialist rank served no particular purpose. Moreover, confusion about the rank's purpose, and the lack of leadership authority associated with it above the grade of E-4, diminished the respect and prestige of those who held it. Calling all soldiers, E-5 and above, "sergeant," rather than some "sergeants" and some "specialists," eliminated the widespread perception that specialists were mere technical experts with no troop responsibility outside of their work area. This in turn increased the sense of unity within the NCO corps and encouraged all NCOs to accept greater responsibility.

Of all his contributions, however, Connelly's greatest was in training. At Connelly's retirement ceremony, General Meyer declared that NCO training had improved tremendously over the previous four years, mainly due to Connelly's leadership.<sup>92</sup> The Sergeant Major's emphasis and efforts, encouraged by his Chief of Staff, had changed attitudes, increased expectations, expanded responsibility, and raised the level of training performance by the NCO corps in units Army-wide. Key to this effort had been the steady improvement of NCOES instruction, especially in the basic course programs for combat arms, combat support, and combat service support. He also contributed to the ongoing adoption and adjustment of the SQTs. One of

many changes implemented in 1982 was the initiation of a common-task test administered to all soldiers up to the grade of E-4.

The focus of his tenure and his legacy to the Army were best summed up by Connelly himself just after his retirement ceremony. Connelly predicted the Army would continue to improve only if NCOs continued to act like NCOs. Their role was critical. He admonished NCOs to never walk past a deficiency, always stress physical fitness, always look for new training approaches, and always stand up and be counted as they promoted the welfare of their troops.<sup>93</sup>

Selection procedures for the seventh Sergeant Major of the Army began in September 1982 with a decision memorandum to the Chief of Staff outlining the process and highlighting proposed changes. Selection criteria remained the same as in 1979, when Connelly was chosen, with one minor adjustment. Because the tenure of the office was still three years, the minimum years of enlisted service before attaining the office were raised to twenty-seven. This allowed the selectee to retire after thirty years' service at the end of his tour as SMA. As in previous cases, the then current Sergeant Major of the Army agreed to the proposed change before it was forwarded to the Chief of Staff for approval.<sup>94</sup>

In May 1983, the Chief of Staff, General John A. Wickham, Jr., announced his selection of Glen E. Morrell, then the command sergeant major of U.S. Army Forces Command, as Connelly's successor. Morrell became the seventh occupant of that office on 1 July 1983.

Morrell received from his boss possibly the most detailed guidance given to any SMA. Wickham's instructions to Morrell completely filled three pages with themes, specific SMA duties, miscellaneous CSA directions to the SMA, and CSA instructions to the Army staff. Some of the themes

Morrell was expected to support included “An Army of Excellence,” “A Modern Army,” and “A Total Army.” Wickham also instructed him to be the CSA’s primary link with the enlisted force and to maintain high standards within it.

In a June interview with the *Army Times*, just prior to assuming office, Morrell outlined his priorities. Among his specific objectives were extra pay for first sergeants and CSMs and the final elimination of the specialist ranks: “Nobody relates to it. Everybody knows what a sergeant is. But nobody can explain what a specialist is. We can’t even explain what a specialist does in our talks with our sister services.” His broader priorities were to encourage NCOs to place more emphasis on teaching basic soldier skills and to “look out for the welfare of the soldier.”<sup>95</sup>

During Morrell’s tour as SMA, stability characterized the Army. Although change occurred as units received new equipment and the Army created new types of units, his tenure illustrated focus, direction, and continuity. By 1986, increased funds for and expertise in recruiting, better enlistment bonuses, a new GI Bill, and improved quality-of-life programs were attracting and keeping good soldiers in the Army. As Congress alleviated financial hardships by increasing household-good weight allowances, travel allowances, and temporary lodging for dependents of enlisted personnel during moves, as well as the annual cost-of-living pay raises, the Army was able to retain more of its best trained leaders.<sup>96</sup>

Nonetheless, the Army exists to defend the nation. The urgency of that mission and the very real concern about the potential Soviet enemy had neither changed nor diminished. Thus the themes of training and readiness ran through all four years of Morrell’s tenure. Sergeant Major Morrell’s focus and emphasis, however, were on fine-

tuning a sound organization. He criticized the Army-wide tendency to send whatever soldiers were available to NCOES courses instead of choosing only the best. Year after year, Morrell reiterated his concern because units selected “soldiers for noncommissioned officer development training who [were] available, who [were] more easily released from units for weeks at a time,” and held that commands were “not selective enough about which soldiers we send to school.”<sup>97</sup> Morrell also admonished the NCO corps to step forward and accept more responsibility; to focus more on basics and fundamentals; to train for the new equipment and exhibit a pride of ownership in its maintenance; and to have each noncommissioned officer train his or her replacement.

During Morrell’s tenure, the Army restructured the NCOES, giving sergeants in combat support and combat service support branches the same type of professional training, oriented toward leader development, as their counterparts in the combat arms branches. Now all noncommissioned officer training followed a common track. The Primary Leadership Development Course, formed in fiscal year 1985 by merging the primary leadership course for combat support and combat service support soldiers and the primary NCO course for combat arms soldiers, focused on leadership. The second step, the Basic Noncommissioned Officer Development Course, contained standard leader training required throughout the Army along with skill training directly required by the soldier in his branch. The common threads of these first two courses bonded the NCOs of all branches. Top performing NCOs of greatest potential then attended the Advanced Noncommissioned Officer Course and the Sergeants Major Course.<sup>98</sup>

The Sergeants Major Academy at Fort Bliss, Texas, also began construction in 1985 to expand its facilities. Two years later



the academy began to provide formal training for all first sergeants and sergeants major. It also trained senior NCOs in operations and tactical intelligence. The Army's goal was to increase enrollment in the first sergeants course from 696 to 1,010 NCOs and in the sergeants major course from 496 to 624. At the same time, the facilities could handle an enrollment of about 500 students annually in the new senior operations/intelligence NCO course.<sup>99</sup>

During Morrell's tour as SMA, the Army experienced a major problem with MOS imbalances, that is, inconsistencies between existing soldier specializations and those needed or authorized. To better balance the MOS structure in 1983, the Army asked 12,400 soldiers in overstrength MOSs to transfer to skill fields with shortages. Around 3,500 soldiers accepted the offer that year, and 1,200 soldiers volunteered the following year. Nevertheless, in mid-1985 the imbalances were still a significant problem. To alleviate the situation, the Army required soldiers planning to reenlist in overstrength fields to designate a secondary choice in a shortage field. At the same time, careerists—those on other than their first enlistment—in overstrength fields were given ninety days to begin moving to a shortage MOS or face mandatory reclassification. Such actions, inevitably to occur again and again in an ever-changing Army, always prompted the attention and review of the SMA.

Morrell's four-year tour ended on 1 July 1987, when Julius W. Gates, who had just been the command sergeant major of U.S. Forces Korea/Eighth U.S. Army, became the eighth Sergeant Major of the Army. In many ways, Gates found himself in an enviable position. His predecessors had bequeathed to him a disciplined, professional, well-trained, motivated noncommissioned officer corps leading superb soldiers who would become the next generation of NCOs.

The institutional foundations existed for continued professionalism, training, and improvement, and the senior Army leadership consistently reaffirmed its commitment to the NCO force. As no other Sergeant Major of the Army before him, Gates had the luxury of overseeing a first-rate organization. He could concentrate his efforts on noncommissioned officer leadership and training, as well as maintaining the professionalism of the NCO corps.

Gates aimed for improving the existing system. His annual messages to soldiers in the October issue of *Army* magazine, when compared to those of Dunaway, Copeland, or Bainbridge, illustrated how far the Army, especially the noncommissioned officer corps, had come since 1967. Articles by earlier Sergeants Major of the Army had usually highlighted problem areas and recommended solutions. Sergeant Major of the Army Gates, on the other hand, filled his articles with praise for new equipment, the excellent military educational system, superb training, and top-notch soldiers and NCOs. Earlier Sergeants Major of the Army had admonished NCOs to act on fundamentals such as taking responsibility, making corrections, or improving ways they treated and trained soldiers. Gates only gently reminded them in general terms about NCO commitment, tactical and technical proficiency, training responsibilities, and a variety of other concerns. In other words, the values and professionalism of the NCO corps envisaged in 1966 had, in the minds of Gates and the other Army leadership, become permanent fixtures. Indeed, these and other NCO qualities were about to be tested in combat.

During Gates' tenure the United States executed two major combat actions. Operation JUST CAUSE (December 1989) was a model of a swift joint operation which restored democratic government to Panama. Less than a year later, in Operation DESERT SHIELD/DESERT STORM (August 1990–April

1991), the U.S. armed forces, assisted by allied nations, decisively defeated Iraq in a war to liberate Kuwait. These operations exorcised any remaining ghosts of the Vietnam War that might have still haunted the Army and its NCO corps.

Perhaps the most unexpected and the most monumental international development was the sudden collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War. Beginning in 1989, the countries of Eastern Europe moved out of the Soviet orbit and replaced their Communist regimes with democratically elected governments. The breakup of the Soviet Union in 1991, along with the demise of the powerful Warsaw Pact, totally changed the military balance in Europe and the world. Since the United States had based its military force structure on its ability to fight a conventional war in Central Europe, victory in the Cold War led to a general security reappraisal. A reduced threat enabled Congress and the Army to pare back the size of the force and to reduce defense budgets.

Army leaders determined that the process would be carefully planned to avoid the hasty reductions of past decades that had made the Army incapable of fulfilling its basic missions. In October 1990 Gates predicted, "The shaping of the Army over the next five to six years is not going to be easy. For the first time, we are confronted with the difficult task of building a smaller Army from an all-volunteer force."<sup>100</sup> He spent much of his last year in office dealing with the projected reductions in Army strength. Although the war against Iraq temporarily delayed the phasedown, everyone understood this was only an interlude.

Sergeant Major Gates concluded his four-year tour and retired from the Army on 30 June 1991. On 2 July, when Richard A. Kidd became the ninth Sergeant Major of the Army, he, like so many of his predecessors, was the top enlisted man of an Army

facing an uncertain future. Fortunately, Sergeant Major of the Army Kidd at least had their strong examples to provide some light and guidance.

Kidd's tour as SMA has focused mainly on ensuring that despite severe reductions, the Army remains a capable, sustainable force, able to fulfill its core mission of fighting and winning the nation's wars. A key challenge for SMA Kidd has been making certain that the Army properly takes care of those of the enlisted force who have left the service as a result of the drawdown. As the Army's budget has been slashed in tandem with the reduction in manpower, SMA Kidd has also concentrated on maintaining funding for critical programs such as the NCOES. He has successfully fought for the opportunity for all promotable soldiers to attend the NCOES schools. In addition, Kidd has tackled such tough issues as sexual orientation and women in combat, making the Army's senior leadership aware of soldiers' attitudes, perceptions, and concerns. Kidd has maintained the tradition of visiting troops deployed overseas in the increasing number of noncombat operations to places like Somalia, Macedonia, and Haiti. He also redesigned the insignia of the SMA, adding an American eagle, to bring it more in line with that worn by his counterparts in the other services.

## Conclusion

Today the Sergeant Major of the Army is still on the personal staff of the Army Chief of Staff. As specified in Army Regulation 600-20, he holds "the senior sergeant major grade of rank . . . [which] designates the senior enlisted position of the Army." As specified by regulation:

The sergeant major in this position serves as the senior enlisted advisor and consultant to the Chief of Staff of the Army. He or she provides information on problems affecting enlisted personnel and

solutions to these problems; on professional education, growth, and advancement of NCOs; and on morale, training, pay, promotions, and other matters. The Sergeant Major of the Army is also available to present the enlisted viewpoint on DA boards and committees. Other functions of this position include meetings with military and civilian organizations to discuss enlisted personnel affairs, receiving enlisted personnel who visit HQDA, and representing all Army enlisted personnel at appropriate ceremonies.

His counsel and views have meaning as he serves on a great number of boards and committees, including the Army Policy Council, the Army Staff Council, and the General Staff Council. Protocol confirms the prestige and importance of the office by giving the SMA a protocol status just beneath the Director of the Army Staff and above all other lieutenant generals on staff.

Many aspects of the office have remained constant since its inception. The Sergeant Major of the Army still spends about half of his time traveling to locations worldwide to visit with soldiers and pass on the greetings and policies of the Chief of Staff. He still performs the original role as the eyes and ears of the Chief of Staff. And even though his duties and responsibilities are now written into a regulation, the duties he performs for the Chief of Staff remain flexible. General Johnson's precedent of instructing Sergeant Major Wooldridge in 1966 continues as each Chief of Staff provides the specific guidance and mission for *his* Sergeant Major of the Army. It may be extensive, detailed guidance, such as that General Wickham gave to Sergeant Major Morrell, or it may be simple verbal guidance as General Westmoreland gave to Sergeant Major Copeland. In any case the guidance has never been a restrictive list of "do's and don'ts" that might circumscribe or limit the SMA's actions. The office remains dependent upon the occupant's initiative to accomplish the mission.

Of course, many things have changed since 1966. Probably the most important is the ready acceptance of the office by the rest of the Army staff. Whereas Sergeant Major of the Army Wooldridge worked endless hours to open doors and establish contacts in various offices and Dunaway and Copeland struggled to strengthen the office against certain bureaucratic inertia to change, the office is now a well-established, accepted member of the Army staff.

The selection process for the Sergeant Major of the Army has become more formal. In a word, it is now institutionalized. Choosing the first two occupants had been simply a matter of sending a message to the field soliciting nominees, with the Chief of Staff then using whatever process he desired to make his choice. Now the selection process involves a relatively formal "zone of consideration" with a variety of factors considered, a process that can take as much as ten months and involves a prestigious selection board of general officers and the incumbent SMA.

Tenure for the office has also changed. Although the term of the first Sergeant Major of the Army was to parallel that of his Chief of Staff, roughly four years, the tenure officially changed to two years following Wooldridge's and Dunaway's two-year terms. In the mid-1970s it was officially increased to a three-year tour, but the last four Sergeants Major of the Army—from Bainbridge onward—have all served a four-year tour, the same duration in office as their respective Chief of Staff, exactly as General Johnson envisioned in 1966. Currently, according to Sergeant Major of the Army Kidd, the tour of duty is three years with the fourth optional.

Finally, the emphasis and focus of the office have changed. In the early years, Wooldridge, Dunaway, and Copeland were mostly concerned with establishing the office, making it a meaningful position, and helping the enlisted force as best they could





Sergeants Major of the Army, past and present. Left to right, George W. Dunaway, Silas L. Copeland, Leon L. Van Autreve, William G. Bainbridge, William A. Connelly, Glen E. Morrell, Julius W. Gates, and Richard A. Kidd. (Courtesy of Michael D. Pike)

during times of great stress and change. The next two occupants, Van Autreve and Bainbridge, were transitional figures in a time of increasing stability who moved from reacting to crises and problems to focusing the office on efforts to bring steady, planned improvement. Connelly and Morrell solidified the gains of their predecessors. By the time of Gates and Kidd, the senior Army noncommissioned officer could afford to take a broader view and emphasize specific adjustments. Instead of having the mission to “establish the office” as did Wooldridge, or to move the NCO corps to an all-volunteer Army as Copeland had to do, Gates and Kidd could devote their energies to specific problems within the more general areas of professional development, training, and quality of life.

The Army created the Office of the Sergeant Major of the Army in 1966 to help professionalize the noncommissioned officer corps and thereby improve its performance and responsibility. The new position gave symbolic and active support to those efforts. The SMA’s office evolved and developed parallel to the professionalization of the NCO corps.

As the Sergeants Major of the Army established the boundaries of their office and institutionalized their position on the Army staff, the Army launched new programs to improve the NCO corps. The Noncommissioned Officer Education System, the Enlisted Personnel Management System, the redesigned rating systems, and the Noncommissioned Officer Professional

Development program all emerged and prospered simultaneously with the growth of the Office of the Sergeant Major of the Army. The Sergeants Major of the Army did not create these programs, but they and their office were symbols of the Army staff's commitment to devote resources, time, and people to restructure the NCO corps.

The Sergeants Major of the Army influenced the new programs. Each was actively involved in counseling, advising, recommending, and checking at each step along the way as the new programs were originated, developed, and implemented. In this way, the new programs and the new SMA office grew in tandem. The Sergeant Major of the Army advocated or encouraged new initiatives. When new programs emerged, the SMA reviewed them. As the staff focused more effort on NCO and enlisted issues, the SMA increased in importance as a sounding board and point for coordination. And as his stature and position on the staff grew, he was increasingly involved in coordinating and developing even more programs and policies.

The Sergeant Major of the Army also gave prestige to the noncommissioned officers. The NCOs now had one of their own across the hall from the Army Chief of Staff; American enlisted soldiers around the globe could be confident that their views could and would be represented to the chief. As a member of the chief's personal staff with unobstructed access, the SMA was no mere action NCO, but an individual whose coordination was essential for all matters relating to the enlisted force. The SMA position also offered all NCOs a career goal with greater stature and prestige than had ever been available.

It is clear today that the original goals for creating the office—fostering direct communication between the enlisted ranks and the Chief of Staff, promoting confidence, increasing NCO prestige, and broadening NCO career incentives—have been met. The

actions of those who held the office, through their work with the Army staff and with the units and soldiers in the field, have also contributed considerably toward the professionalization of the NCO corps.

The Sergeant Major of the Army is not a policymaker. He neither initiates, coordinates, nor implements staff actions. He has no recurring reports to submit, nor does he have any specific responsibilities or projects which his office must monitor or complete. Instead, he works *for* a policymaker, and provides information and a point of view to assist the number one Army officer in making decisions. In his capacity as the eyes and ears of the Chief of Staff he performs an invaluable service, not only by carrying the views of enlisted personnel directly to their chief, but also by communicating to the enlisted people Army-wide whatever message the chief wants them to be sure to hear. As the senior enlisted representative he influences the policies and staff actions of the Army staff whenever they affect the enlisted force, and thereby ensures that their interests are being represented and their concerns are being considered.

The Sergeants Major of the Army have performed invaluable services for the noncommissioned officers and enlisted soldiers of the United States Army. They helped professionalize the noncommissioned officer corps; they represented the interests of the enlisted force in the highest councils of the Army and helped bring about many positive changes in policy; and they raised the morale of soldiers in visits to duty stations around the globe. The powers of the office allowed this to happen, but the men who held that office during its first quarter-century made it happen too. Their strength, their insight, their determination, and their devotion to duty greatly contributed to forming the superb Army that the United States has today.

# Notes

1. John C. Chapin, *Uncommon Men: The Sergeants Major of the Marine Corps* (Shippensburg, Pa.: Beidel Printing House, 1993), pp. 1–2.
2. William K. Emerson, *Chevrons: Illustrated History and Catalog of U.S. Army Insignia* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1983), pp. 183, 195–97.
3. Arnold G. Fisch, Jr., and Robert K. Wright, Jr., *The Story of the Noncommissioned Officer Corps* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 1989), pp. 21–23; Interv, Sgt Maj (Ret.) Erwin H. Koehler with SMA (Ret.) Silas L. Copeland, 19–21 Oct 93, pp. 247–49, author's files, CMH.
4. Entry of the Office of the Chief of Information, Department of the Army, for the 1967 Silver Anvil Award Competition, Public Relations Society of America, author's files, CMH.
5. Interv, Lt Col Rupert F. Glover with General Harold K. Johnson, 22 Jan 73, no. 10, p. 5, U.S. Army Military History Institute, Carlisle Barracks, Pa.
6. Chapin, *Uncommon Men*, pp. 6, 7, 75, 76; James M. Carr and William O. Wooldridge, *Sergeant Major of the United States Army* (Fort Bliss, Tex.: U.S. Army Museum of the Noncommissioned Officer, 1986), p. 16. According to Wooldridge, on the day that his appointment as Sergeant Major of the Army was made public, the office of then Sergeant Major of the Marine Corps, Herbert Sweet, was moved upstairs to a location next door to the office of the Commandant of the Marine Corps. Chapin says that after the other services created top NCO positions, the position of the Sergeant Major of the Marine Corps, which had existed since 1957, was formalized.
7. Johnson interview, pp. 5–6.
8. Speech, General Harold K. Johnson to Sergeants Major Conference, 28 Nov 66, Washington, D.C. Copy in Harold K. Johnson Papers, box 64, folder 3, Military History Institute.
9. *Ibid.*, pp. 6–7.
10. *Ibid.*
11. *Ibid.*, p. 7.
12. Johnson interview, p. 8.
13. Russell F. Weigley, *History of the United States Army* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), p. 558.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 570.
15. Fisch and Wright, *Story of the NCO Corps*, pp. 18–26.
16. Wooldridge, Answers to Historical Interview Questions, dated 1 Jun 91, p. 1, Encl to Memo, SAPA-LS, 29 Oct 90, sub: Historical Interview Questions, author's files, CMH.
17. *Ibid.*
18. SMA William O. Wooldridge, "First Look at a New Job," *Army* 16 (October 1966): 43; Bettie J. Morden, *The Women's Army Corps, 1945–1978* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 1990), p. 393. WACs served in separate units under female commanders and were attached to the units or offices where they performed their duties. They were integrated into the Army on 20 October 1978, and the Women's Army Corps was dissolved.
19. SMA William O. Wooldridge, "Contact Point with the Top for the Soldier in the Field," *Army* 17 (October 1967): 53.
20. Wooldridge, "First Look at a New Job," p. 43.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 84.
22. Johnson interview, p. 10.
23. *Ibid.*



24. U.S. Congress, House, Committee on Armed Services, Special Subcommittee on Enlisted Promotion Policy Review, *Hearings August–November 1967*, 90th Cong., 1st sess., 1967, pp. 7052–53.

25. U.S. Congress, House, Committee on Armed Services, *Hearings Before the Special Subcommittee on Enlisted Promotion Policy Review* (August 2, 3, 8, 9, 10, 15, 16, 22, September 21, 27, 28, October 4, November 16 and 21, 1967), 90th Cong., 1st sess., 1967, no. 38, p. 7050.

26. Wooldridge, Answers to Historical Interview Questions, 1 Jun 91, p. 3.

27. Johnson interview, p. 9.

28. Ltr, SMA (Ret.) William O. Wooldridge to Dr. Ernest F. Fisher, Jr., U.S. Army Center of Military History, 6 Jun 82, pp. 2–3; Ltr, MACJOO, HQ, USMACV (Col. R. H. Johnson), to SMA Wooldridge, 10 May 68. Both in author's files, CMH.

29. MS, Ernest F. Fisher, Jr., The Noncommissioned Officer in the U.S. Army, 1775–1975 (hereafter cited as The NCO), pp. 8–9, author's files, CMH.

30. Wooldridge, "First Look at a New Job," p. 84; Wooldridge, "Contact Point with the Top for the Soldier in the Field," p. 53.

31. SMA George W. Dunaway, "New Emphasis Aims at Putting More Strength in 'Backbone of the Army,'" *Army* 19 (October 1969): 34; Wooldridge, Answers to Historical Interview Questions, 1 Jun 91, p. 2. The centralized system for temporary promotions to the top two grades was approved on 28 June 1968.

32. SMA George W. Dunaway, "New Voice at the Top for the Enlisted Man," *Army* 18 (November 1968): 47–48.

33. Wooldridge, Answers to Historical Interview Questions, 1 Jun 91, p. 2.

34. MS, Harold K. Johnson, Challenge, 1 Jul 68, p. 438, in the Harold K. Johnson Papers, Military History Institute.

35. Encl to Memo for Record, 17 Jul 67, sub: Command Sergeants Major Program. signed by Col J. A. Leclair, Jr., Chief, Senior Enlisted Control Branch, author's files, CMH.

36. Ibid.; Johnson, Challenge, p. 438.

37. Ltr, Wooldridge to Fisher, 6 Jun 82, pp. 3–4; News Release 658–68, 16 Jul 68, Office of Assistant Secretary of Defense (Public Affairs), Washington, D.C.

38. Interv, Sgt Maj (Ret.) Erwin H. Koehler with SMA (Ret.) George W. Dunaway, 18–21 Jan 94, p. 84, author's files, CMH.

39. Weigley, *History of the United States Army*, p. 561; *Department of the Army Historical Summary, Fiscal Year 1969* (hereafter cited as *DAHSUM*)

(Washington, D.C.: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 1973), p. 3; *Department of the Army Historical Summary, Fiscal Year 1970* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 1973), pp. 3, 54.

40. Johnson interview, p. 5; Wooldridge, Answers to Historical Interview Questions, 1 Jun 91, p. 1.

41. George W. Dunaway, "Random Thoughts and Comments Regarding the Office of Sergeant Major of the Army," Apr 93, pp. 1–2, author's files, CMH. The Office of Personnel Operations was later named MILPERCEN—and later still, TAPA—and moved from the Pentagon to the Hoffman Building in Alexandria, Va.

42. Ltr, Wooldridge to Fisher, 6 Jun 82; "Army Opens a Can of Legal Worms," *Armed Forces Journal*, 14 Mar 70, p. 11; *Army Times*, 17 Sep 69, p. 1; *Washington Daily News*, 27 Sep 69. The allegations were that on 4 December 1968 and 20 February 1969, CSM Wooldridge "accepted from MareDEM, Ltd., a California corporation engaged in the sales of food-stuffs and other merchandise to the Non-commissioned Officers' Open Mess System in the Republic of Vietnam, a stock equity valued at \$15,000, and a check representing profits of MareDEM, Ltd., for the recommendation of assignments of military personnel who would be in a position to purchase foodstuffs and other merchandise from MareDEM, Ltd."

43. *Army Times*, 14 Mar 73, p. 2; *Army Times*, 23 May 73, p. 5; *Army Times*, 13 Jun 73, p. 8; *Washington Post*, 3 May 73, p. A2; *New York Times*, 6 Sep 69, p. 17; *New York Times*, 26 Sep 69, p. 1; *New York Times*, 8 Oct 69, p. 28; *New York Times*, 24 Oct 69, p. 1; *New York Times*, 5 Dec 69, p. 16. It also led in August 1969 to the revocation of the Distinguished Service Medal Wooldridge received at the conclusion of his tour as Sergeant Major of the Army, even though the alleged incidents occurred after he left office in August 1968. In March, Wooldridge pleaded guilty to conflict of interest, agreed to cooperate in further investigations, and in June was sentenced to a suspended prison term, probation, and three years of work for a nonprofit charity.

44. Dunaway, "Random Thoughts and Comments Regarding the Office of the Sergeant Major of the Army," pp. 1–2.

45. Dunaway, "New Emphasis Aims at Putting More Strength in 'Backbone of the Army,'" p. 33.

46. Ibid.

47. Ibid., pp. 33–35; *DAHSUM, Fiscal Year 1969*, pp. 38–39; *Department of the Army Historical Summary, Fiscal Year 1973* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 1977), p. 71.

48. Dunaway, "New Emphasis Aims at Putting More Strength in 'Backbone of the Army,'" p. 36; *NCO Education and the Development of NCOES* (Fort Bliss, Tex.: U.S. Army Sergeants Major Academy, 1992), p. 3.
49. *DAHSUM, Fiscal Year 1970*, p. 56.
50. SMA George W. Dunaway, "'People Benefits' Will Get More Emphasis in '70s," *Army* 20 (October 1970): 34–35.
51. MS, Relationship with the Chief of Staff and Major Challenges, apparently from an interview with SMA Copeland, pp. 2–3, author's files, CMH.
52. *Ibid.*, p. 4.
53. Interv, Koehler with Copeland, 19–21 Oct 93, pp. 203–07.
54. Relationship with the Chief of Staff and Major Challenges, pp. 3–5.
55. *Department of the Army Historical Summary, Fiscal Year 1972* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 1974), p. 2.
56. *Ibid.*, p. 3.
57. SMA Silas L. Copeland, "The NCO Must Grow with Army," *Army* 22 (October 1972): 24–25; "Winding Down of War Calls for Top Leaders," *Army* 21 (October 1971): 26–27.
58. Relationship with the Chief of Staff and Major Challenges, pp. 6–7.
59. *DAHSUM, Fiscal Year 1973*, p. 34.
60. *Ultima Register, 1973–1987* (Fort Bliss, Tex.: U.S. Army Sergeants Major Academy, 1987), pp. 6–140. Sergeants Major Bainbridge and Van Autreve were honorary graduates.
61. "But You're a Combat Veteran. You . . . Know Everything," *The NCO Journal* 2 (Fall 1992): 15.
62. Relationship with the Chief of Staff and Major Challenges, p. 8.
63. Msg, DAPO-EPC-SO, 281440Z Sep 72, sub: Zone of Consideration for Nomination of Command Sergeants Major to Serve as Sergeant Major of the Army.
64. Ltr, SMA Glen Morrell to SMA (Ret.) William O. Wooldridge, 25 Aug 86, with attached questionnaire for ex-SMAs, author's files, CMH.
65. Ltr, General C. W. Abrams to General B. Rogers, 5 Jan 73; Memo, Col R. L. Adcock, Asst Dir, Military Personnel Management, for Executive, ADCSPER, for Executive, ADCSPER, sub: Selection of new SMA; Interv, Sgt Maj (Ret.) Erwin H. Koehler with SMA (Ret.) Silas L. Copeland, 19–21 Oct 93, pp. 227–28. All in author's files, CMH.
66. *Department of the Army Historical Summary, Fiscal Year 1974* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 1978), p. 158; *Department of the Army Historical Summary, Fiscal Year 1975* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 1978), p. 139.
67. SMA Leon L. Van Autreve, "Where the 'People' Programs Are: The NCO at the Apex," *Army* 24 (October 1974): 17.
68. Fisch and Wright, *Story of the NCO Corps*, pp. 28–29.
69. *DAHSUM, Fiscal Year 1975*, pp. 30, 43–44.
70. Fisher, *The NCO*, ch. 21, p. 17.
71. Handwritten note, General Weyand to "Dutch," 3 Jun 76, with handwritten note, Vice Chief of Staff to DCSPER, 8 Jun 76. Both in author's files, CMH.
72. *Department of the Army Historical Summary, Fiscal Year 1976* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 1977), pp. 156–57.
73. *Department of the Army Historical Summary, Fiscal Year 1978* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 1980), pp. 3, 4, 188.
74. Fisher, *The NCO*, ch. 21, p. 19.
75. *Ibid.*
76. U.S. Congress, House, Committee on Armed Forces, Military Compensation Subcommittee, *Junior Enlisted Personnel Stationed Overseas*, 95th Cong., 2d sess., 1978, pp. 123–39; Military Personnel Subcommittee, *Hearings on CHAMPUS*, 96th Cong., 2d sess.; Subcommittee on Military Construction Appropriations, *Military Construction Appropriations for 1985*, 98th Cong., 1st and 2d sess., 1984, pp. 107–94; *Military Construction Appropriations for 1986*, 99th Cong., 1st sess., pp. 269–335; Military Construction Appropriations for 1988, 100th Cong., 1st sess., pp. 1–103; Senate, Subcommittee on Manpower and Personnel, *Department of Defense Authorization for Appropriations for FY88–FY89*, 100th Cong., 1st sess., pp. 1371–80, 1669–82; House, Committee on Armed Forces, Subcommittee on Defense Appropriations, *Department of Defense Appropriations for 1989*, 100th Cong., 2d sess., pp. 1–79.
77. SMA William G. Bainbridge, "First, and Getting First," *Army* 25 (October 1975): 23–24.
78. *DAHSUM, Fiscal Year 1978*, pp. 51, 52; Dan Cragg, "Where Are They Now? SMA William G. Bainbridge," *Army Times*, 1 Aug 83, p. 14.
79. Larry Carney, "Bainbridge Hailed as NCO Leader," *Army Times*, 2 Jul 79, p. 16.
80. SMA William G. Bainbridge, "We Have Met the Challenge," *Army* 28 (October 1978): 26–28.
81. Carney, "Bainbridge Hailed as NCO Leader."
82. Memo, DAPE-MPE-PS for Chief of Staff, 19 Sep 78, sub: Sergeant Major of the Army—DECISION

MEMORANDUM, with CSA approval, 3 Oct 78, author's files, CMH.

83. Ibid.

84. *Department of the Army Historical Summary, Fiscal Year 1983* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 1990), p. 211.

85. SMA William A. Connelly, "For NCOs: Leadership, Hard Work and TRAINING," *Army* 30 (October 1980): 21.

86. Larry Carney, "New SMA Opposes O'sea Kin Cuts," *Army Times*, 23 Jul 79, p. 5.

87. SMA William A. Connelly, "The Soldier Remains Our Ultimate Weapon," *Army* 29 (October 1979): 24.

88. Connelly, "For NCOs: Leadership, Hard Work and TRAINING," pp. 21-24.

89. SMA William A. Connelly, "Sergeant Major of the Army," *Army* 32 (October 1982): 27-30.

90. Encl to Ltr, Morrell to Wooldridge, 25 Aug 86, p. 5; *DAHSUM, Fiscal Year 1983*, p. 52.

91. Encl to Ltr, Morrell to Wooldridge, 25 Aug 86,

p. 5; Fisch and Wright, *Story of the NCO Corps*, p. 29.

92. Larry Carney, "Our Business Is Soldiers, Says Departing SMA," *Army Times*, 4 Jul 83, p. 2.

93. Ibid.

94. Memo, DAPE-MPD-CD, 7 Sep 82, sub: Sergeant Major of the Army—DECISION MEMORANDUM, author's files, CMH.

95. Larry Carney, "New SMA Outlines Priorities for His Term," *Army Times*, 27 Jun 83, p. 16.

96. *Department of the Army Historical Summary, Fiscal Year 1986* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 1989), pp. 3, 93.

97. SMA Glen E. Morrell, "What Soldiering Is All About," *Army* 36 (October 1986): 41.

98. *DAHSUM, Fiscal Year 1985*, p. 28; *Department of the Army Historical Summary, Fiscal Year 1986* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 1989), p. 30.

99. *DAHSUM, Fiscal Year 1985*, p. 28.

100. SMA Julius W. Gates, "Bootprints That Will Never Fade," *Army* 40 (October 1990): 35.





# **The Sergeants Major of the Army**





# William O. Wooldridge

**W**illiam O. Wooldridge, the sixth of ten children, was born on 12 August 1922, in Shawnee, Oklahoma. Three years later, his family moved to Brownwood, Texas, where his father became a farmer and cattle rancher. Wooldridge remembered those early years in rural Texas as “hard but satisfying.” Growing up in the Southwest’s often harsh environment undoubtedly helped mold his character.

William first began to have thoughts about a military career after his older brother enlisted in the Army in 1929. He tried to follow in his brother’s footsteps, but his parents would not allow him. Determined to give the Army a try, he finally enlisted at the age of eighteen, on 13 November 1940, and began his basic training. “There is no comparison with basic training in those days and what the recruit has now,” Wooldridge recalled. “Then we were given four short weeks of training and drill and assigned to a regular outfit.” By his own admission, his first few months in the Army seemed quite useless with the majority of his time spent on seem-

ingly endless work details. “I was digging pits for the company kitchen, latrines, and sometimes just digging for the sake of digging.” After basic training he was assigned to Company F, 23d Infantry, 2d Infantry Division, at Fort Sam Houston, Texas. While there, Wooldridge attended the regiment’s Squad Leaders Course in 1941.

Unlike many soldiers who decide only gradually to make the Army a career, Private Wooldridge knew from the beginning of his service that he wanted to become a professional soldier. Over forty years later, he remembered the NCOs in Company F as “true professionals—the company first sergeant, my platoon sergeant, and my platoon guide”—who influenced him to become a Regular Army noncommissioned officer. “I did not again, in the U.S. Army, serve under NCOs so qualified in their jobs.” Wasting no time in following their example, he was promoted to corporal within six months of arriving in the 23d Infantry. Wooldridge remembered meeting his old Company F first sergeant shortly after World War II and ask-

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Except as noted, this section is based on an interview contained in *The Sergeant Major of the Army: The First Twenty Years, 1966–1986* by SGM (Ret.) James M. Carr and SGM (Ret.) William O. Wooldridge (Fort Bliss, Tex.: U.S. Army Sergeants Major Academy, 1986), pp. 13–27; on Wooldridge, *Answers to Historical Interview Questions*, 1 June 1991, pp. 1–7, in CMH files; and on Carl Martin, “SGM Wooldridge—Enlisted Advisor, Consultant, Spokesman,” *Army Digest* 21 (December 1966): 49–50.



First Sergeant Wooldridge (far right)  
relaxes with fellow NCOs.

ing him why he had been promoted to corporal in such a short time. His ex-first sergeant wryly replied, "You weren't much good as a private so I thought I'd try you as a corporal."

In December 1941 the Army placed Wooldridge on detached service with the British forces in Iceland. The British had taken over the defense of the island after the Nazi invasion of Denmark in 1940. In turn, the German threat required Britain to turn over the defense of Iceland to the United States, then still neutral. The most enduring impression of Wooldridge's three-year tour of duty was the role of the regimental sergeant major (RSM) in the British Army. Unlike his counterpart in the U.S. Army at the time, the RSM literally ran the regiment, participated in unit training, and "could do

anything the troops could do, and usually better." Years later as a sergeant major, Wooldridge followed the examples of those RSMs he had seen in Iceland. He also held them as a standard for all U.S. Army sergeants major, too many of whom he felt spent an excessive amount of time in their offices as administrators.

In 1944 Wooldridge returned to duty with the U.S. Army and was assigned to the 1st Infantry Division in the European Theater of Operations. He distinguished himself for gallantry in action at Aachen, Germany, in October 1944, and received the Silver Star. Wooldridge participated in the vicious winter combat of the Battle of Bulge in December 1944, when Hitler's army made its desperate thrust toward Antwerp in hopes of splitting the Allied forces. Again in the thick of the fighting, he was recognized for his valor under fire with a second Silver Star.

In May 1945, following the end of the war in Europe, the Army assigned Wooldridge to Fort Sam Houston, Texas, where he stayed until December 1946. Posted briefly to Schofield Barracks, Hawaii, he attended the "First Three Graders Course" at the Oahu Officer Troop and Staff School. Upon completing the course in March 1947, he was sent to Headquarters, Eighth U.S. Army, located in Japan.

Wooldridge returned to Germany and the "Big Red One," the 1st Infantry Division, in July 1949. At the time the Seventh Army had started an NCO school in Munich and Wooldridge, then a platoon sergeant, asked permission from his first sergeant to attend the course. When asked why, Wooldridge responded, "I intended to stay in the Army and . . . I wanted to be something more than a rifle platoon sergeant." His first sergeant was unconvinced: "You're a combat veteran. You already know everything." When Wooldridge continued to press the issue, his

sergeant summarily told him, “You’re wasting my time,” and ordered him “out of my orderly room.” In those days, Wooldridge explained, a soldier had to provide for his own education and training. “I went to night school. There were no requirements to attend school if you didn’t want to. Now, you must get training or you don’t get promoted.”

Wooldridge returned to the United States in May 1954 and was assigned as first sergeant of Company G, 3d Infantry, Fort McNair, Washington, D.C. The nature of the 3d Infantry’s mission in the nation’s capital was largely ceremonial, and Wooldridge did not regard the assignment as exceptionally challenging for an infantry first sergeant. In December 1955 he went back to the 1st Infantry Division, now located at Fort Riley, Kansas, again as a first sergeant. He was appointed as the sergeant major of the 3d Battalion, 26th Infantry, on 20 December 1956.

The following year, Wooldridge returned to Germany and was assigned as the sergeant major of the 2d Battle Group, 28th Infantry, 24th Infantry Division. Looking back on his career, Wooldridge listed this service as the most significant in terms of his professional development and advancement. This assessment was due in part to his attendance in 1960 of the Southern Command Senior Noncommissioned Officers School at McGraw Kaserne in Munich, where he honed his professional skills. His hard work and competence were recognized in March 1963 when he was selected to become the 24th Infantry Division’s sergeant major.

In January 1965 Wooldridge again returned to the 1st Infantry Division as the sergeant major of the 1st Brigade. In June 1965 he was selected to be the division sergeant major and went to Vietnam with the division’s advance party after a few weeks. After the entire division arrived, his main job

was to visit units in the field and take a close look at how the enlisted ranks were faring. Once he saw a soldier wearing “Ho Chi Minh” sandals, made of pieces of automobile tire and leather straps. Demanding an explanation from the company first sergeant, he was told that no size thirteen boots were available and that the battalion sergeant major had known about it for the past two weeks. Infuriated, Wooldridge had the support command sergeant major find boots of the right size by the next day. He later “unloaded on the infantry battalion sergeant major,” who quickly lost his job.

Although Wooldridge relished being a combat soldier and thrived on the demands of the battlefield in Vietnam, he was soon challenged to make his most important contribution to the Army—establishing the Office of the Sergeant Major of the Army. As noted earlier, the position of Sergeant Major of the Army was established on 4 July 1966. One objective was to boost the morale and professionalism of the enlisted force by having one of its own become the personal assistant to the Chief of Staff of the Army on almost all matters relating to enlisted soldiers. The major reason was to establish an official channel from the enlisted ranks to the highest military echelon in the service on such issues as morale, welfare, training, pay and allowances, clothing and equipment, enlistment and reenlistment, discipline, and promotion policies.

In 1966 the Army had over 4,700 sergeants major, all of whom were eligible for appointment to the new position of Sergeant Major of the Army. Major Army commanders throughout the world nominated members of this group to fill the position. Although the nominees were chosen for their ability as soldiers, their military bearing, their personality, and their skill in expressing themselves on Army matters, only one was then serving in Vietnam—William O.





Wooldridge, as Sergeant Major of the 24th Infantry Division, with General Bruce C. Clarke.

Wooldridge. Perhaps the other sergeants major there and their commanders were still too busy transitioning their forces into Southeast Asia as the Big Red One had been the first Army division to arrive there. Whatever the case, General Harold K. Johnson, the incumbent Army Chief of Staff, carefully weighed the strengths and weaknesses of each, and selected the combat-experienced Wooldridge.

General Johnson swore in Sergeant Major Wooldridge on 11 July 1966 at the Pentagon. Before the ceremony, the Chief of Staff gave him this guidance:

You will be a member of my personal staff and will be my principal enlisted assistant and advisor on all matters pertaining to enlisted members of the Army. You will report directly to me and there will be no one between your desk and mine. When you need to see me you will use the private entrance to my office. The only other person who uses that entrance is the Secretary of the Army.

Johnson's instructions laid the foundation for the close relationship between all successive Chiefs of Staff and their Sergeants Major. Chief of Staff Johnson wanted the Army's top NCO to be visible and available to soldiers. "I did not bring you here to sit behind a desk," he told Wooldridge. "You will have others for the office work who will know something of your habits and thinking because they will be your representatives and during your absence must act for you." As his only other formal guidance, he presented Wooldridge with a card outlining the duties of the Sergeant Major of the Army.

Wooldridge's appointment as the first Sergeant Major of the Army affected not only the Army, but also prompted action in the other services. After taking office, Wooldridge heard from Sergeant Major of the Marine Corps Herbert Sweet that he had previously worked for a colonel in Marine Corps Personnel. But the day after the news of Wooldridge's appointment was made public, he was moved to an office next to the Commandant of the Marine Corps. Wooldridge felt that "the Army Chief of Staff created the first real and effective top enlisted position." In actuality, he may have created several. Within a year, the other two services followed suit with the Chief Master Sergeant of the Air Force, Paul W. Airey, and Master Chief Petty Officer of the Navy, Delbert D. Black, occupying similar positions.

As the very first Sergeant Major of the Army, Wooldridge faced a tough challenge. No precedents existed regarding the scope of his job, its focus, or its specific responsi-

bilities. Never one to shrink from difficult tasks, Wooldridge evaluated the missions General Johnson gave him and determined a series of goals that would accomplish them. First, to strengthen the overall professionalism of the NCO corps, he wanted to improve the NCO education system. Second, Wooldridge resolved to “root out NCOs who had ‘homesteaded’ in the soft jobs such as ROTC [Reserve Officer Training Corps], civil components, West Point, other senior schools, and the U.S. Army Rifle Team and require a tour in Vietnam or force retirement.” These units, he noted, “were loaded with NCOs holding unauthorized MOSs attained for promotion purposes.” Third, he wanted to upgrade the key enlisted position of company and battery unit clerk from E-4 to E-5. Finally, he set out to see as many of the Army’s troops as he could in the continental United States and overseas, especially those engaged in combat in Southeast Asia, so he could gain an accurate picture of the morale, training, and living and working conditions of the Army’s entire enlisted force.

Wooldridge succeeded in most of the goals he had set. Improving the NCO education system proved the most difficult. Although raising the consciousness of the Army’s leaders in this area, at least enough to see the planning process begin, he later admitted that he had not reached his target because “the Army’s resources were committed to war.” Wooldridge noted that he solved the homesteading problem and elevated the authorized grade for unit clerks. As for gaining a reliable understanding of the general conditions affecting the enlisted force, Wooldridge spent almost half of his tenure on the road to attain a sense of “ground truth” that could in turn be communicated to the Army Chief of Staff.

Wooldridge gave a great deal of effort to visiting soldiers in Vietnam and to pursu-

ing ways to help them through their combat ordeals. In his first year alone, he made four trips to combat zones in Southeast Asia, always seeking out firsthand information on battlefield conditions and then passing on what he learned to the Army at large. Soldiers learned what they would encounter in an *Army Digest* article titled “So You’re Headed for Combat: How to Get Ready and What to Expect,” published in January 1968, the same month as the unexpected Tet offensive by the Viet Cong in which dozens of American military installations were attacked. Wooldridge presciently advised, “Even you men who have jobs ‘behind the lines’ may have occasion to fight, if only to defend yourselves. The experience of our troops in Vietnam has reemphasized an old lesson—every soldier must be able to fight.”<sup>1</sup> There were no front lines in Southeast Asia.

Another aspect of Wooldridge’s job as Sergeant Major of the Army was to present a positive public relations image of the Army’s enlisted ranks. Wooldridge spoke at the Washington Press Club and the National Press Club and appeared on nationwide television shows such as “The Ed Sullivan Show” and “The Today Show.” In addition, he was featured in a *Life* article, “The Army’s Topmost Sarge,” in September 1967. Wooldridge even accompanied President Lyndon B. Johnson on a trip to Fort Campbell, Kentucky. The net result of all this “show biz” work was both critical and significant. For the first time it put a major spotlight on the enlisted ranks, gradually demolishing the “Sergeant Bilko” image of NCOs and gaining recognition for them as true professionals.

After his tour as Sergeant Major of the Army, Wooldridge was asked to comment on the major items approved during his tenure

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1. “Headed for Combat,” *Army Digest* 23 (January 1968): 6.



SMA Wooldridge (left) visits with Sergeant Major Dunaway at Bien Hoa, Vietnam, 1967.

that he deemed most beneficial to the Army and to the enlisted soldiers in particular. Wooldridge deemed the Command Sergeants Major Conferences “one of the finest initiatives approved on behalf of the noncommissioned officer.” From them flowed “the ideas which would influence the advancement of the corps for years to come.” He equally complimented the creation of the Command Sergeant Major Program, which he felt correctly highlighted the difference between sergeants major in staff positions and those who served as senior enlisted advisers to

Army commanders above company level. Wooldridge also noted great benefits from the institution of a centralized promotion and assignment system for senior NCOs which “broke up the old unit promotion system, opening up all vacancies in the Army to all eligible NCOs.” Last, Wooldridge found the new Noncommissioned Officers Combat Course at Fort Benning, Georgia, worthy of special praise.

When Wooldridge’s two-year tour came to a close in the summer of 1968, the new Army Chief of Staff, General William C. Westmoreland, chose a new Sergeant Major of Army. After a selection board gave Westmoreland a list of recommended finalists from which to choose, he asked Wooldridge’s advice. Wooldridge highly recommended Westmoreland’s final choice, Sgt. Maj. George W. Dunaway. As Wooldridge turned over the reins to Dunaway, he could be proud of much he accomplished during his tenure. Above all, he had met the tough challenge General Johnson set for him to establish the Office of the Sergeant Major of the Army.

Wooldridge bid farewell to Washington, D.C., in September 1968 and assumed his new position as the sergeant major of the Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (MACV). Then, in the fall of 1969 he moved on to the White Sands Missile Range, New Mexico, to be the sergeant major of the installation’s Range Command. He finished thirty years and ten months of service in the Army on 31 January 1972, retiring at Fort MacArthur, California. Although the scandal involving the Army’s NCO club system operations in Vietnam later tarnished the final years of Sergeant Major Wooldridge’s career, it could not diminish his heroic wartime exploits in an older, harder-pressed Army or his arduous labors on behalf of the enlisted soldiers as the first Sergeant Major of the Army.



## Assignments

1940	Enlisted at Fort Sam Houston, Texas, in Company F, 23d Infantry, 2d Infantry Division
1941-44	Detached service, British Forces-Iceland
1944-45	1st Infantry Division, Northwest and Central Europe
1945-46	Fort Sam Houston
1946-47	Schofield Barracks, Hawaii
1947-49	Headquarters, Eighth U.S. Army, Seoul, Korea
1949-54	1st Infantry Division, Germany
1954-55	First Sergeant, Company G, 3d Infantry, Fort McNair, Washington, D.C.
1955-58	First Sergeant, Sergeant Major, 1st Infantry Division, Fort Riley, Kansas
1958-63	Sergeant Major, 2d Battle Group, 28th Infantry, 24th Infantry Division, Germany
1963-65	Sergeant Major, 24th Infantry Division, Germany
1965-66	Brigade, Division Sergeant Major, 1st Infantry Division, Fort Riley
1966-68	Sergeant Major of the Army
1968-69	Sergeant Major, Military Assistance Command, Vietnam
1969-72	Sergeant Major, Range Command, White Sands Missile Range, White Sands, New Mexico

## Selected Decorations and Awards

Silver Star with one Oak Leaf Cluster  
Legion of Merit with one Oak Leaf Cluster  
Bronze Star Medal  
Army Commendation Medal with one Oak Leaf Cluster  
Purple Heart  
Air Medal  
Combat Infantryman Badge with Star



# George W. Dunaway

In January 1940, at the age of seventeen, George W. Dunaway enlisted in the Virginia National Guard, joining Company A, 176th Light Infantry Regiment, 29th Infantry Division, as a rifleman. Born on 24 July 1922 in Richmond, Virginia, he had grown up working summers on his grandfather's farm along with his two brothers and three sisters. He attended school in Richmond until the tenth grade, when he had to leave school and work to help support his family. He thought that school "was rewarding and I was lucky to be able to attend school, because so many other kids had to work on farms and were not able to go to school." Years later as a sergeant, first class, he earned his high school equivalency diploma at Fort Benning, Georgia.

George Dunaway's motivation to join the National Guard reflected the great strength of that institution—unit cohesion. Everyone knew each other, lived in the same area, and in some cases were childhood friends. "If I hadn't known anybody in the unit, I probably would have felt that the military wasn't for me; but seeing all my friends there, my own age, I decided it was OK. I

still have a soft spot in my heart for the National Guard because of those times. We all knew each other, and when they put us on the train early in the morning to go off for maneuvers, many people would turn out to see us off."

Dunaway's company trained every two weeks and was divided into ability groups based on each soldier's previous experience. Biweekly drills focused on individual, squad, and platoon training—disassembling and cleaning the rifle, wearing a uniform properly, and marching. The annual company-level summer training took place at Camp A. P. Hill, Virginia. Dunaway remembers, "We did a great job. We even won an exercise over the Regular Army . . . at least that's what we were told. We had great morale and felt that no one could touch us." Company A attacked the Regulars, a horse cavalry unit, at dawn while they were eating breakfast, and captured the entire battalion headquarters. Such success was no doubt due to the high morale and the initiative that the commanders encouraged in their noncommissioned officers. It certainly wasn't due to excellent equipment. Company A's mortar platoon



used stovepipes to simulate mortars; its other elements often fared little better.

Dunaway joined the Regular Army in February 1941, when the 29th Division entered federal service, and immediately undertook eighteen weeks of combat skills training at Fort Meade, Maryland. Living and working conditions in the Army of the 1940s were far different than they are today. Dunaway lived in a two-story wooden barracks, heated with coal in winter and without air-conditioning in summer. Each company had its own mess hall, and kitchen police (KP) was performed by soldiers under the rank of corporal instead of by contracted civilians. An onerous but necessary duty, KP entailed "washing trays, pots, and pans, scrubbing floors, peeling potatoes by hand, and cleaning grease traps." Only relatively recently has this long-time Army fixture disappeared.

Unit leaders, not drill instructors, led training. Most of the time, NCOs conducted unit training, except for live-fire exercises, which required the presence of an officer. Instead of bringing in instructors from outside the unit to teach specialized subjects, the company NCOs learned those subjects themselves and then taught them to their soldiers. This approach not only increased their own knowledge, but also enhanced their credibility with their soldiers. After all, in the stress of combat far away from the training environment, no outside instructors would be available for guidance. The unit emphasized all aspects of military skills. World War II was already in its second year of fighting in Europe, and Dunaway and his unit had little doubt that the war would soon engulf the United States. He and thousands of soldiers like him were taught that "there were only two kinds of soldiers—the quick and the dead."

Soldiers in Dunaway's company, as well as throughout the Army, underwent frequent

inspections, "in ranks, standing by our bunk, and constantly throughout the day by all superiors." The big inspection, however, came on Saturday. "The Saturday morning inspection was where soldiers learned the proper way to wear and care for their uniforms, awards, and decorations. In those days, each soldier knew how to wear properly each and every item of his uniform, and NCOs knew how to teach them all." Only soldiers who had no deficiencies received a weekend pass. Otherwise they remained in the barracks after the inspection and spent the weekend correcting their shortcomings.

In February 1943, at Fort Myer, Virginia, Dunaway married Mary ("Peck") Henry from Springfield, Massachusetts. Like thousands of other married soldiers in the midst of a rapidly expanding Army, the Dunaways found that family quarters were almost nonexistent. In August, they moved to Fort Benning and lived in a barn loft, complete with a well and an outhouse. As Peck recalled, "We had to go outside and use the half-moon latrine and we had to pump water from the well and bring it upstairs to cook and bathe with. It was uncomfortable with almost no privacy, but it was better than being back home away from my husband."

A decision that shaped the rest of George Dunaway's Army career prompted the move to Fort Benning. He volunteered for parachute training. When his National Guard unit was activated, "two or three of the men from my hometown had gone directly to jump school when the rest of us went to Fort Meade. When they returned to the unit wearing wings and spit-shined jump boots, they really looked sharp . . . they impressed me very much, and I decided I'd go airborne as soon as I got the chance. Everyone was a volunteer, and no one could complain because he didn't have to be there."

The ensuing weeks of jump school were, and still are, tough. For Dunaway, it

was tougher. During the preparatory week, a physical uncovered a medical problem requiring surgery. He was given five weeks to recuperate and was assigned as the first sergeant of the stockade—"some learning experience." After recovering, he resumed training and went through the ground, tower, and jump weeks being pushed hard the entire time. NCO trainees attracted more attention from the instructors, because they were expected to meet the highest standards. Twice, Dunaway passed out when he had done as many push-ups as he could. "The only time they let you stop was when you lost consciousness." There was a reason. He became an instructor, which is why he "was put through the mill without mercy, to see if [he] could take the pressure." In the end, when he pinned on his silver wings after his fifth jump, he believed that the agony had been worthwhile.

If Dunaway had any complaint about serving in airborne units, it was the disparity in jump pay between officers and enlisted men. "Enlisted men were paid \$55 a month extra for jumping, which was a lot of money then, and officers were paid \$110 a month. It seemed to us that there must be two doors on the plane, the \$55 door and the \$110 door. We were always looking for the \$110 door but never managed to get through it."

After jump school, Dunaway attended pathfinder school and glider training. Landing in a glider was probably more dangerous than jumping, but glider soldiers received no extra hazard pay. Once released from the towing aircraft, they were on their own in the flimsy wooden aircraft. Without power they depended on air currents for whatever limited range they enjoyed. Pilot skill was critical and controlling the glider was always problematic. Wires or trees were considered normal hazards. With both jump and glider training, Dunaway could be assigned to either a parachute or glider regiment within an airborne division. He spent the majority of his career



Dunaway prepares to jump with his troops.

thereafter in airborne infantry units—the 501st Airborne Battalion; the 187th, 505th, 517th, and 542d Parachute Infantry Regiments; the 82d and 101st Airborne Divisions; and the Special Forces.

Following a series of airborne courses at Fort Benning, Dunaway became an instructor in basic airborne training. After accumulating seventy-five training jumps, he attended the eighteen-week Noncommissioned Officers' Leadership Course. At the time World War II was reaching its climax, infantry casualties had begun to mount, and he expected orders

for overseas duty at any time. They came toward the end of 1944, assigning him to the 517th Regimental Combat Team (RCT) (Airborne), then in France.

Dunaway found that "getting to France was just as hectic as being in the war there." In those days, few soldiers were deployed overseas by air. Dunaway and others destined for overseas duty were trucked from Fort Benning to the troop train, which took them to Fort Dix, New Jersey. There they practiced embarkation, debarkation, and emergency procedures for three days, all followed by a nine-day sea voyage to Liverpool, England. Then, after a train ride across England, a ship across the English Channel, and a cattle-car ride across France, he arrived at Montage, where the 517th, assigned to the Third Army, formed part of the Supreme Headquarters, Allied Expeditionary Force (SHAEF), strategic reserve. As a platoon sergeant in Company H, Dunaway fought in Belgium and Germany during the Battle of the Bulge. Morale and discipline in the airborne units were exemplary. The NCOs were excellent. These were conditions that he found again and again in the elite, volunteer units with which he served throughout his career. Dunaway stayed in Europe until November 1945, when he was sent back to Fort Benning.

With the war over, Sergeant First Class Dunaway had no intention of staying in the Army. His battalion commander in the 517th RCT offered to make him a first sergeant if he would reenlist, "but it wasn't like it had been back in my original Guard unit where I had known so many guys. Those days were gone and I had to make new friends and acquaintances each place I went." The day before he was due to be discharged, he visited his family in Washington, D.C. His brother-in-law, just discharged from the Air Force, came in from working late on the railroad, grimy and covered with soot. He told Dunaway that he too would be working

for the railroad as soon as he was discharged. Dunaway "took but a few seconds to decide that was not for me. I reenlisted for six years. That turned out to be the smartest thing I ever did." He immediately returned to Fort Benning as an instructor for the Airborne Department.

In March 1948 Dunaway was transferred to Fort Bragg, North Carolina, and assigned to the 505th Parachute Infantry as the regimental operations sergeant. In September 1950 he, along with selected members of the regiment, participated in a nuclear test in Nevada. First they observed the detonation from three miles away and, after "experts" determined ground zero to be clear of radiation, examined ground zero. "Two-and-a-half-ton trucks had been demolished, buildings with steel frames had been ripped to pieces, and some twisted up like tangled kite string." Doctors checked all the men for radiation effects.

While in the 505th, he became a first sergeant when he was reassigned to Company G. Inexperienced at first, he relied on his company commander and the other first sergeants for guidance. Platoon sergeants handled discipline problems within the platoon, which made Dunaway's job easier. Only serious cases reached him or the company commander. One of the biggest problems was keeping the troops occupied during the duty day. Training in garrison was often repetitive and boring as the company participated in field training exercises (FTXs) only twice a year, once for practice and once for grade. Usually the platoons conducted the training, with the first sergeant responsible for their administrative and logistic support. During the semiannual FTXs, the company flew to another training area or post, conducted a mass tactical jump with personnel and equipment, and executed all of the infantry missions—attack, movement to contact,



delay, and defense. As in his previous units, Dunaway was impressed with the leadership qualities of the NCOs who, despite the boredom of the garrison routine, managed to maintain such high morale that 90 percent of the men in the unit reenlisted. In 1952 Dunaway reached the top after only twelve years in the Army, becoming the regimental sergeant major of the 505th.

In early 1954, Sergeant Major Dunaway began his second overseas tour of duty. Posted to the 187th RCT in Japan as the regimental sergeant major, he remained with the "Rakkasans" for seven years through changes of location and unit designation. He had been in Japan for only a year when the regiment redeployed to Fort Bragg in July 1955. Later that year it moved to Fort Campbell, Kentucky, and was redesignated the 2d Airborne Battle Group, 187th Infantry, and assigned to the newly reactivated 101st Airborne Division. This was the era of the pentomic Army, which Army planners developed for operations on a nuclear battlefield. The new force structure dictated a battle group, an organization between a battalion and a regiment in size. Five battle groups constituted a pentomic division, such as the 101st.

As expected, the two moves, not to mention the redesignation, were major headaches for Sergeant Major Dunaway. Before the reactivation of the 101st, the 11th Airborne Division had been the major unit at Fort Campbell. As part of Operation GYROSCOPE, the largest troop movement undertaken in peacetime, the 11th moved to Europe. But only soldiers with thirty-three months left on their enlistments deployed with the division. Those who did not and were unwilling to reenlist were assigned to other units remaining at Fort Campbell, including the 187th. The apathetic attitudes of these "short-timers," soon to leave the Army, understandably affected the battle group despite the best efforts of the NCOs.

Only after all these personnel had been discharged could the sergeant major and his NCOs succeed in "molding a well-trained, highly motivated, efficient, airborne organization of the highest order." A decade later, during the Vietnam War, similar problems occurred Army-wide as returning combat veterans entered stateside units with only a few months left on their enlistments.

As a restructured unit with many newly assigned soldiers, the 187th had to develop a sense of unity and teamwork. In Dunaway's words, "One of the major ingredients in a well-rounded organization is teamwork. Troops are taught teamwork in their jobs, but it takes more than that. There has to be a good sports program and there has to be some social life that involves the family. In the 187th and all of the organizations where I was the sergeant major, we had both." To do this, Sergeant Major Dunaway recommended and supported several programs: the Soldier of the Month program, unit sports activities (baseball, football, and basketball at the regimental and battle group level), and periodic social events. Social gatherings were always especially significant events for the wives of young soldiers, some of whom "had never worn a long dress before."

During Dunaway's long tenure at Fort Campbell, he became closely involved in community activities. In those seven years he managed a Little League team, taught Sunday school, served as president of the PTA, was president of the Board of Governors of the NCO Club, and supervised the post thrift shop. Dunaway later regarded his greatest accomplishment as the 187th sergeant major to be simply his longevity in office. "I guess I stayed with the 187th about as long as anyone. I watched commanders come and go. I watched senior NCOs come and go. Some even went on overseas tours and came back to the 187th and I was still there." Dunaway and his wife in fact sup-

plied much of the continuity and cohesion that kept the airborne force a first-class unit. One couldn't mention the 187th in any conversation without bringing up the Dunaways. When he left the 101st Airborne Division in 1961, he never thought that he would return to the division for combat in Vietnam.

Sergeant Major Dunaway's next station was in Okinawa, where he was assigned as sergeant major of the 1st Special Forces Group. The group had troops in Vietnam, Laos, Thailand, and Taiwan, so Dunaway traveled frequently with the group commander. As at Fort Campbell, the Dunaways left their mark, always seeking to enhance unit morale and cohesion. They hosted several parties to encourage young soldiers and their wives to know each other socially, and Dunaway personally introduced the Special Forces blazer. It became such a sought-after item that soldiers back at Fort Bragg scheduled for an assignment in Okinawa ordered it ahead of time. Another of Dunaway's measures met with less enthusiasm, but in the end was just as effective at instilling esprit de corps. "When I arrived I noticed in short order that some of the men had mustaches, most of them long, shaggy, and unkempt, sometimes with food caught in them. After getting my commander's total backing, I announced that the mustaches had to go." Highly unpopular at first, the clean upper lip eventually became a mark of pride in serving with the 1st Group and Sergeant Major Dunaway.

His frequent travels in Southeast Asia to visit the far-flung teams not only kept them informed and improved their morale, but also acquainted Dunaway with the area, particularly Vietnam, where he would serve next. In June 1966 he departed Okinawa for Nha Trang, Republic of Vietnam, where he was assigned as the sergeant major of the 5th Special Forces Group.

Sergeant Major Dunaway spent most of his time traveling to the Special Forces A, B,

and C teams widely dispersed in South Vietnam's four corps tactical zones. As in previous assignments, Dunaway had the fortune to serve with top-notch soldiers. He initiated an on-the-spot promotion and award system to reward deserving soldiers immediately without waiting for official command visitations. The occasional disciplinary problem he reassigned immediately. Such soldiers were told to report to the sergeant major, "bag and baggage," the phrase becoming as well known as the "Dunaway blazer" and the no-mustache policy. His duties and extensive TDY allowed him only one ten-day break to visit his family, living in Australia while he was in Vietnam. In June 1967, after a year with the 5th Group, Dunaway received new orders reassigning him as the 101st Airborne Division sergeant major at Fort Campbell.

His stay at Fort Campbell proved short. The airborne unit was then preparing to deploy to Vietnam, and he spent most of his time visiting division units as they prepared for the move. The 101st had many nondeployable soldiers and NCOs, either because they had too little time left on their enlistments or because they had just returned from Vietnam. Dunaway redistributed the experienced, deployable NCOs throughout the division. The changes ensured that every unit had at least some NCOs with combat experience.

The 101st Airborne deployed to South Vietnam in the latter half of 1967. Once in Vietnam, Dunaway did everything he could to increase morale for the soldiers, especially those serving far from any major base camps. NCO and enlisted clubs, showers and clean clothes, entertainment, Soldier of the Month competitions, and promotion selection boards helped morale. But often the most effective measure was simply the visible presence of the division commander and his sergeant major out in the field, arriving by helicopter sometimes through enemy fire.

On one occasion, the commanding general, Maj. Gen. Olinto M. Barsanti, was wounded by ground fire and collected yet another Purple Heart. Dunaway later mused that the general might have deliberately guided their helicopter into "hot" landing zones for the purpose of adding to his existing collection of Purple Hearts. As for Dunaway, "I wasn't interested in getting one . . . that's an award they can keep!" But running the risks of enemy fire paid off, often allowing the commanding general and his sergeant major to decorate soldiers on the spot for heroism and see firsthand a unit's problems and requirements during active combat.

Dunaway did not have to go out into the field to seek danger. In January 1968, the Tet offensive saw both division and brigade base camps hit by enemy attacks. In what he had previously considered a safe place, an NCO standing two feet from him was shot and killed by rifle fire. Dunaway's role in repelling a two-day North Vietnamese attack on the division base camp—evacuating and treating the wounded, manning defensive positions that were short of personnel, and redirecting troops as needed on the defensive perimeter—earned him the Silver Star.

Personnel continuity challenged the sergeants major for all units in Vietnam. Since the 101st had arrived in Vietnam en masse, most of its soldiers would complete their one-year tour at the same time. Yet if every soldier departed Vietnam at the end of his one-year tour, the division would disappear, or at least new and inexperienced soldiers, officers and enlisted alike, would replace almost all of the combat-seasoned veterans. In such a case, unit efficiency and cohesion would quickly drop to just about zero. To prevent that, Dunaway and the United States Army, Vietnam (USARV), sergeant major exchanged personnel with other divisions to more evenly spread out their dates of return to the United States. "It bothered me that men who volun-

teered to go back to Vietnam with the 101st had to be transferred to other divisions against their wishes, but it had to be done, and it was successful." In July 1968 Dunaway departed Vietnam for an assignment that his division commander had foreseen. When the XVIII Airborne Corps commander visited Fort Campbell in 1967, General Barsanti introduced Dunaway as "my Division Sergeant Major, and the next Sergeant Major of the Army." Less than a year later the prediction came true.

In 1966 the Chief of Staff, General Harold K. Johnson, had considered Dunaway for his SMA, but had chosen another. Two years later, General William C. Westmoreland took a closer look, challenging him with "some pretty tough questions" during a 45-minute interview. Nevertheless, in July 1968 at Camp Eagle, Vietnam, the division chief of staff greeted him with a message from Westmoreland: Dunaway had just been selected as the new Sergeant Major of the Army. Coincidentally, that same day General Barsanti turned over command of the 101st to Maj. Gen. Melvin Zais, under whom Dunaway had served in the 517th RCT during World War II and in the 187th at Fort Campbell. After the shock of the news wore off, Dunaway "considered declining the appointment in order to stay on with the fine men of the 101st. I was proud to be their sergeant major and it was great to have General Zais as my commander again. But, I decided, I could contribute much more from the top than I could from within." All of the division's sergeants major and many first sergeants came to Camp Eagle to see Dunaway off. "I was proud; I was honored; and, let's face it, I was a little scared thinking of what lay ahead."

Despite the doubts and questions he had on his long flight home, Dunaway realized that his twenty-eight years of Army experience, sixteen as a sergeant major, had



prepared him well for the top enlisted job in the Army.

I realized that I was, in fact, qualified to do this job, and do it well. From that point on, all the doubts that had plagued me in the beginning suddenly disappeared and I faced each new day with the powerful self-confidence it takes to succeed. The most important thing I always remembered was where I came from. I was a soldier who had dug slit trenches, pulled KP and guard duty, and crawled in the mud. It was that soldier that I came to represent, and I did my best every day I was Sergeant Major of the Army.

Dunaway had little overlap with the incumbent Sergeant Major of the Army, William Wooldridge, who went back to Vietnam to serve as the command sergeant major of the Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (MACV). Wooldridge had made the point that the new office had generated some disgruntlement among senior staff officers who “resented having an enlisted man accorded more privileges than they.” He had carefully opened channels of communication with each staff section and was afraid that they would close once he left. Dunaway had to keep those doors open. To assist him, Dunaway enlisted the help of several staff officers in the Pentagon whom he knew personally from previous tours. “Eventually I was able to get cooperation wherever and whenever I needed it. Today, more than twenty years later, most of those ‘doors’ are permanently open to the Sergeant Major of the Army because the position has been well established. But the first three or four Sergeants Major of the Army had to be the pioneers.”

General Westmoreland swore in Sergeant Major Dunaway on 1 September 1968 in the presence of his family, the 3d Infantry (Old Guard), the press, and sergeants major from all over the Army. Reviewing the Old Guard with General Westmoreland, Dunaway considered it “an honor to have the Chief of Staff of the Army accord an enlisted man a position of such

respect.” After the ceremony, when Dunaway had his family settled at Fort Myer, Westmoreland welcomed him aboard and briefed him on his vision of the Army’s goals and objectives—Mission, Motivation, Modernization, and Management. Rather than give him any specific guidelines, the Chief of Staff challenged him to represent the entire enlisted body of the U.S. Army.

As Sergeant Major of the Army, Dunaway had ready access to General Westmoreland. When he needed to see him on an issue that required his attention, he told Westmoreland’s aide and then walked right into the office unless the chief was conferring with a major commander or staff officer. Dunaway was careful not to abuse this privilege by bothering Westmoreland with trivial issues that he could solve himself or through other means. The Chief of Staff also rated the SMA and having an office directly across the hallway facilitated access. But Dunaway was aware that even the location of the SMA’s office caused resentment, since senior officers had been displaced to make room for the first Sergeant Major of the Army.

It took Dunaway a while to get used to his access to the Chief of Staff, the SMA’s spacious office, and the four-star protocol accorded its incumbent. “I had been accustomed to going to the office of a full colonel or brigadier general to report or coordinate, and it took a while for me to get used to them coming to my office.”

He had few difficulties obtaining any information he needed to carry out his duties. He and his counterparts from the other services periodically received briefings from the Department of Defense staff, and could request specialized briefings on any subject on an informal basis. The Secretary of Defense, Melvin Laird, and the Secretary of the Army, Stanley Resor, even stopped by his office from time to time to talk to him

about various Army issues. Besides providing a means of exchanging information, visits from high-ranking officials further enhanced the prestige and credibility of the two-year-old office. Such visibility also encouraged officers of the Army staff to include the Sergeant Major of the Army in policy-making discussions dealing with issues affecting enlisted soldiers.

One of the most satisfying aspects of his job was the ability to solve problems for soldiers, problems that could or would not be solved expeditiously through normal channels. Dunaway avoided circumventing normal staff procedures, but found that bringing the attention of the appropriate staff section to a soldier's problem was usually all that was needed for a solution. In such matters, he worked most often with the Enlisted Personnel Directorate (EPD), the Inspector General (IG), the Judge Advocate General (JAG), and the Deputy Chief of Staff for Logistics (DCSLOG). All, he recalled, were "exceptionally prompt and courteous with their responses."

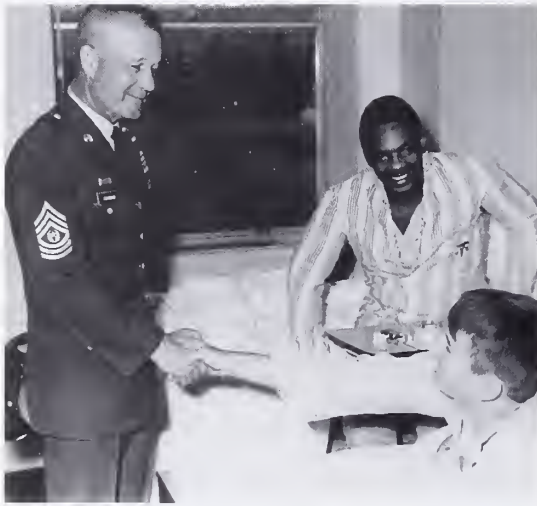
His assistance to one soldier later had a direct bearing on the Office of the Sergeant Major of the Army. In the late fall of 1968, he received a call from the command sergeant major of the 20th Engineer Brigade, Leon Van Autreve, who was within fifteen days of leaving Vietnam and still had no word on his next assignment. Although willing to serve anywhere, he opted for Alaska or Fort Gordon if he had a choice. Dunaway promptly went to the command sergeant major assignment section. He learned of several options, including the command sergeant major of U.S. Army, Alaska. Dunaway accepted it on Van Autreve's behalf.

Later, however, the position was given to another man. Dunaway went to the chief of EPD, a brigadier general, to inform him of the mix-up. The EPD chief told Dunaway



SMA Dunaway talks with trainees at Fort Benning, Georgia, 1969.

that his directorate made assignments of enlisted members and they would not be changed by a sergeant major. Dunaway politely told him, "Sir, I did not change the assignment, and I did not influence it. I simply asked your people to make an assignment they had overlooked. Therefore CSM Van Autreve goes to Alaska unless you get authority from General Westmoreland to change his assignment." When the general went to the Chief of Staff, Westmoreland backed up his Sergeant Major.



Dunaway visits hospitalized soldiers.

In retrospect, Van Autreve's assignment to Alaska was critical for his future career. It meant that he would be rated by a general officer, one of the requirements for consideration for the position of Sergeant Major of the Army. Soon thereafter, at General Westmoreland's direction, the EPD proposed assignments of command sergeants major to major Army commands, but the Sergeant Major of the Army approved them.

To meet Westmoreland's challenge to represent the Army's enlisted soldiers, Dunaway visited the troops in the field, from Europe to Korea, from Hawaii to Vietnam. As he later said, "I did not visit all the Army's installations during my two years, but I managed to squeeze in the majority of them. No doubt I traveled more than was expected of me, and it sure gets hectic living out of a suitcase and never sleeping in the

same place two consecutive nights. However, I wanted to be visible and wanted soldiers of all grades to know there is someone who could hear their problems and go right to the top with problems that had merit." He also wanted soldiers to know that they could reach the top if they set high goals and worked toward them.

Dunaway also visited National Guard and reserve units. Because the reserve components usually drilled on weekends, he integrated those trips into his schedule for active units. He believed that the reservists often felt left out of the Army picture and that most people did not know the contribution they made to national defense. He wanted reservists and guardsmen to know that their efforts were crucial to the war in Vietnam. He proudly told them that he "had been a National Guard man in the beginning," and related that "I could always tell they were proud of me for reaching the top from . . . [that] beginning."

To set the example of including one's family in Army life, Dunaway took his wife, Peck, with him as he visited installations around the world. Believing that the military wife is an important part of the Army, Dunaway could see no better way to demonstrate his wife's importance to him than by having her accompany him. At first he paid for her travel out of his own pocket, but soon found the costs prohibitive. Later the comptroller general "scolded" him for not coming to him right away with the problem; thereafter TDY funds became available for both of them. While he talked with NCOs and junior enlisted soldiers, Peck talked with their wives and gained an understanding of the problems they faced, later relaying those concerns to her husband. She also accompanied her husband to ceremonies at the White House, such as during the presentation of Medals of Honor, or at receptions President Richard M. Nixon gave for the senior enlisted representatives of the



armed services, with appropriate coverage by television and print media.

During his two-year tenure, Dunaway continued to institutionalize the office, focusing greater attention on the concerns of enlisted soldiers. Soon after taking office, he asked the Army staff to inform him of all proposed policies that affected enlisted personnel. Once the chief approved the request, Army staff officers became accustomed to seeking his advice and including him in the decision-making process on issues affecting soldiers. For example, he secured approval for hospital commanders to promote deserving soldiers who had been wounded in Vietnam. Existing policy dropped casualties from the unit rolls, so many wounded GIs were ineligible for promotion because they had been on hospital status. He also started an accelerated promotion for pay grades E-6 (staff sergeant) and E-7 (sergeant, first class) who were top NCO academy graduates.

During Dunaway's tenure, the Chief of Staff approved the Noncommissioned Officer Education System (NCOES), a three-tiered system that trained NCOs in basic, advanced, and senior courses. The capstone was the Sergeants Major Academy at Fort Bliss, Texas, which trained master sergeants for duty as sergeants major at battalion level and above. Although the projected Sergeants Major Academy did not go into operation until after he retired, Dunaway believes that "there can be no question that it is one of the best things that ever happened to the NCO corps."

To improve morale and enhance public perception of the Army, Dunaway changed the Army's uniform policy. His recommendation that reserve component soldiers be allowed to wear three-year service stripes reinforced the "one Army" concept; his recommendation to allow soldiers returning from Vietnam to wear jungle fatigues rather than their khaki uniforms (which became

rumpled after soldiers spent hours sitting on an airplane) was equally successful. "We were already under attack from the civilian sector because of the unpopularity of the war . . . the least we could do was to make our veterans look as clean, neat, and well dressed as possible."

He also changed the policy on the wear of the Pathfinder Badge. The metal badge, which replaced a cloth sleeve insignia, was supposed to be worn instead of the parachutist badge, because Pathfinders were also airborne qualified, a policy which the Deputy Chief of Staff for Personnel instituted. But this stricture made it impossible for senior and master parachutists to display their advanced proficiency without the traditional wings. When Dunaway brought the situation to General Westmoreland's attention, he directed a change allowing those qualified to wear both badges. Westmoreland also announced that he would thereafter personally approve all changes to uniform regulations.

Dunaway also refined and improved enlisted assignments. He saw to it, for example, that the award of the special qualification identifiers (SQI) for open mess NCOs was limited to those who were fully qualified. The change gradually improved the open mess system and stopped the loss of mess sergeants from troop units. After a hard battle, he also corrected another longstanding problem—the lack of additional pay for drill instructors. The extra hours of duty and the requirements for well-maintained uniforms merited additional pay to attract and retain good NCOs for this critical duty. Dunaway's persistence resulted in additional funding for drill instructor pay.

Dunaway continued Wooldridge's Command Sergeant Major Program. This program essentially differentiated sergeants major who served as senior enlisted advisers to commanders, based on their own careers of extensive troop leadership experience,



SMA Dunaway (left), with his counterparts from the other services, visits President Richard Nixon.

from sergeants major who advanced to the highest pay grade through administrative and technical fields with limited troop leadership experience. He also clarified the rank structure for senior NCOs. When SMA Wooldridge started the Command Sergeant Major Program, the titles were confusing and the title of staff sergeant major was not well received by soldiers. Dunaway recommended that the titles be restricted to three—Sergeant Major of the Army, Command Sergeant Major, and Sergeant Major—and that all three be addressed as “Sergeant Major.”

Among the other initiatives Dunaway pushed was a marked stress on ordinary soldiers’ use of credit unions, making them less

apt to become victims of loan sharks and analogous problems. He also continually emphasized the need for soldiers to work in their military occupational specialties (MOSs). Too often soldiers were trained and tested in one specialty, only to be assigned to another due to personnel shortages in units. Incorrect assignments wasted money when a soldier trained in a skill he did not use. There was also the issue of fairness, since victims of incorrect assignments were expected to perform in a field in which they had no training. On his trips to troop units, Dunaway sought out soldiers who were not working in their MOS and, if necessary, arranged on-the-spot reassignments.

As the representative of the Army's enlisted personnel, Sergeant Major Dunaway testified before Congress on military enlisted matters with his counterparts in the other services. He met senators and congressmen in the Secretary of the Army's office and became close with Senator Mendel Rivers, Chairman of the Armed Services Committee, "the military's best friend." His many meetings gave congressmen a unique perspective on matters affecting the enlisted ranks and the Army in general.

To make the soldier's voice heard at the highest level, the Sergeant Major of the Army hosted the major command (MACOM) Command Sergeant Major Conference in conjunction with the Chief of Staff's Major Commanders' Conference. Before each conference, sergeants major solicited ideas and recommendations from the enlisted ranks and these passed up through the enlisted command channels. At the MACOM level, a panel of command sergeants major examined what had been judged the best or most significant ideas and recommendations. They forwarded their selections to Dunaway's conference. Before the creation of the Office of the Sergeant Major of the Army, the voice of enlisted soldiers was often silenced before reaching the Department of the Army. Now, at least someone heard their ideas and concerns. And that someone, the SMA, had direct access to the Chief of Staff. "In the final analysis," said Dunaway, "we didn't get everything approved, but we got lots of things that never would have surfaced through the officers' chain of command." After the conference, the SMA sent a record of recommendations, approved or not, down to all units. This kept commanders, NCOs, and soldiers informed of significant matters.

By the time Dunaway became Sergeant Major of the Army, the term of office was to coincide with that of the Chief

of Staff, normally four years. Yet after considerable thought Dunaway recommended that it be limited to two years. This had two benefits. First, it allowed the maximum number of command sergeants major to hold the job, motivating many of them to stay in the service longer in hopes of attaining the position. Second, it ensured a fresh flow of ideas to the Chiefs of Staff and meant that the senior enlisted soldier would have recent experience with troops. General Westmoreland approved the two-year term in June 1970. The benefits of recent troop experience also led Dunaway to believe that the candidates for the position should come from command sergeant major slots at or below division level. This would eliminate the requirement that candidates have a general officer as their immediate rater. There were too many excellent brigade and battalion command sergeants major that the existing system had overlooked.

Sergeant Major of the Army Dunaway retired on 30 September 1970, after thirty years of service in the Army. In a moving ceremony at Fort Myer, he trooped the line of the Old Guard with his Chief of Staff. "General Westmoreland looked at me and said, 'Sergeant Major, you're going to miss all of this.' I said, 'Yes sir, I know.' Yes, I knew I'd miss it, and the tears welled up in my eyes as I thought about what it would be like to leave behind the only life I had known for the past thirty years. But it also felt good to know that I had done my job well every day of the thirty years I had served." A few years ago, when asked if he ever had any undesirable assignments, the ever no-nonsense soldier Dunaway replied, "A career is a career. Orders are orders. Loyalty is loyalty. The oath is the oath."

When asked about what he considered his greatest accomplishment as Sergeant Major of the Army, Dunaway humbly pointed out that "nothing can be considered per-



manent, because any Chief of Staff can change virtually anything he desires. Probably the most permanent improvements that I am proud of are initiatives that were introduced before my tenure, but which materialized or grew during or after my tenure.” The two greatest are the Command Sergeant Major Program and the Sergeants Major Academy. The most rewarding aspect of being Sergeant Major of the Army was “being in the position to influence Army-wide policies pertaining to enlisted personnel, and getting top-level atten-

tion and focus on matters that never got to the top prior to the establishment of the Sergeant Major of the Army position.”

Dozens of three- and four-star generals, the commandant of the Marine Corps and his sergeant major, sergeants major, first sergeants, sergeants, first class, and many other soldiers, attended Dunaway’s retirement ceremony. Afterward, he and Peck toured Fort Myer in a horse-drawn carriage, hosted a farewell party, and said goodbye to the Army they both loved.

## Assignments

1940-43	Rifleman through Platoon Sergeant, Company A, 176th Infantry Regiment, 29th Infantry Division
1943-44	Student, Jump School, Pathfinder, Glider, Fort Benning, Georgia
1944-45	Student, Noncommissioned Officer Leadership Course, Fort Benning
1945	Platoon Sergeant, Company H, 517th Regimental Combat Team, 13th Airborne Division, France, Belgium, Germany
1945-48	First Sergeant, Company A, 501st Parachute Infantry Regiment, Fort Benning
1948-52	Operations Sergeant, First Sergeant, 505th Parachute Infantry Regiment, 82d Airborne (Abn) Division, Fort Bragg, North Carolina
1952-54	Sergeant Major, 505th Parachute Infantry Regiment, 82d Airborne Division, Fort Bragg
1954-56	Sergeant Major, 187th RCT (Abn), Japan, Fort Bragg
1956-61	Sergeant Major, 2d Airborne Battle Group (ABG), 187th Infantry, 101st Airborne Division, Fort Campbell, Kentucky
1961-66	Group Sergeant Major, 1st Special Forces, Okinawa
1966-67	Group Sergeant Major, 5th Special Forces, Vietnam
1967-68	Division Sergeant Major, 101st Airborne Division, Fort Campbell and Vietnam
1968-70	Sergeant Major of the Army

## Selected Decorations and Awards

Distinguished Service Medal  
 Silver Star  
 Legion of Merit  
 Bronze Star with V Device  
 Purple Heart  
 Air Medal with V Device  
 Army Commendation Medal with one Oak Leaf Cluster  
 Good Conduct Medal  
 American Defense Service Medal  
 American Campaign Medal  
 European-African Middle Eastern Campaign Medal  
 World War II Victory Medal  
 National Defense Service Medal  
 Vietnam Service Medal  
 Vietnamese Armed Forces Honor Medal, Second Class  
 Vietnamese Cross of Gallantry with Silver Star  
 Republic of Vietnam Campaign Medal  
 Combat Infantryman Badge with Star





# Silas L. Copeland

**S**ilas L. Copeland was inducted into the Army on 28 October 1942 in Huntsville, Texas. He was twenty-two years old and married with one baby daughter. Born in Embryfield, Texas, on 2 April 1920, he grew up on a cotton farm and was educated in a one-room schoolhouse from the first grade through high school. Like most of the new World War II recruits, his term of service was for the duration of hostilities plus six months. He had no idea that he would be assigned to the Army Air Corps. Six weeks of basic training in St. Petersburg, Florida, made an indelible mark on the new recruit. His strongest impression concerned his drill sergeant: "Here was an individual—from his stature, from the long years of service as indicated by those hash marks running down his sleeve, the way he spoke, the way he conducted himself, the way he moved—here was a person that you could look up to. He just carried himself in such a manner, and spoke in such a manner, that you couldn't help but have a favorable impression."

Drill instructors did not scream at recruits in Copeland's unit. Had they yelled

and cursed, he believes that his view of the military might have been much different. Instead, "all because of the first impression that I received at the induction station, all the way through my basic training, out through my first unit assignment," he saw the Army as a healthy, positive institution.

Advanced training began at Biggs Army Airfield, near El Paso, Texas. Copeland was assigned to the 538th Heavy Bomber Group. Within a few days of his arrival, the group departed for England and the war, leaving behind the recruits, including Copeland, to support base operations at Biggs. Initially, Copeland found himself driving an eighteen-wheel fuel truck, but he was soon promoted to sergeant and quickly became a refueling specialist, working for another sharp NCO. His new boss, a master sergeant, had been a veteran of Pearl Harbor and was now responsible for the refueling of every flight that landed on the airfield. "He was an articulate NCO. He was an impressive NCO. He'd talk with you, communicate with you. Never hollered at you. He treated people well. All you had to do was your job."

By late 1944 heavy fighting in the European and Pacific theaters had stretched the U.S. Army's manpower to the limit. The Army's projected ninety-division force of more than eight million soldiers was starving for combat arms replacements. To meet that need, thousands of soldiers in support jobs like Copeland were reassigned, "retreaded," into combat units almost overnight.

Copeland's civilian experience in heavy automotive equipment, road construction, civil engineering, and maintenance of equipment in general made him a suitable replacement for "Hell on Wheels," the 2d Armored Division. He became a tank commander before he rode in his first tank, but he recalls his gunner saying, "Sergeant, don't worry. We'll teach you the fundamentals of tank operations."

In December 1944 he received orders for overseas movement to the 2d Armored Division, joining Company E of the veteran 66th Armored Regiment, near Cologne, Germany. The regiment had battle scars from North Africa, Sicily, Anzio, France, Holland, the Ardennes, and the Rhine River. "They had tanks shot out from underneath them, would pick up another tank, get their wounds dressed, and go back into battle. You were there for the duration." In Company E Copeland began his association with combat-seasoned soldiers and noncommissioned officers. "They had to know what they were doing or they wouldn't have survived. They were in some real battles." Again he was told, "Don't worry about it, Sarge, we'll teach you." Sergeant Copeland fought the closing days of World War II in Europe as a member of the 2d Armored Division.

By May 1945 the Nazis were finished. In September, Japan surrendered. Homefront public opinion called for rapid demobilization of the military and for bringing the boys home quickly. Copeland also wanted to get home to see his wife and daughter, but he seemed

stuck with occupation duty in Germany. Then his first sergeant gave him some advice. If a draftee enlisted in the Regular Army for a three-year hitch, he was eligible for a ninety-day leave and a return ticket to the States and would serve with his division upon its return to the States. "It wasn't a career-wise decision that I made. It was a 'get yourself home as quickly as possible' type decision." Copeland signed up for three years and returned to the United States in time to celebrate Christmas 1945 with his family. In early March 1946 he rejoined the 2d Armored Division at its new station, Fort Hood, Texas.

He stayed with the 2d Armored until mid-March 1950 when he was transferred to the 1st Cavalry Division, then on occupation duty in Japan. There he became a battalion intelligence sergeant. Previously Copeland had attended a two-week course of instruction at the Fort Hood NCO academy, as well as a twelve-week course at Fort Riley, Kansas. The training dealt primarily with operations and intelligence, focusing on developing operations orders; formulating plans; conducting research; publishing orders; interpreting photos and order of battle; and collecting, analyzing, and producing combat intelligence. Little did he know that within five months he would be applying what he had learned in another shooting war.

War in Korea struck suddenly in late June 1950. Sergeant First Class Copeland was with the 2d Battalion, 8th Cavalry Regiment, 1st Cavalry Division, and by mid-July 1950 his unit had begun its famous fight to hold the Pusan Perimeter in South Korea. "We went over there with only 55 to 60 percent strength, and that strength was mostly recruits. Consequently we used KATUSA [Korean Augmentation to the United States Army] to fill out our units." The fighting around Pusan was fierce and continuous, and Copeland's battalion was in combat for ninety-three consecutive days.

In Korea, Copeland initially served in the battalion's intelligence and reconnaissance (I&R) platoon as the intelligence and reconnaissance sergeant. Like most of the other experienced NCOs, one of his basic responsibilities was to make raw American youngsters understand the price of mistakes in wartime. "We made a lot of mistakes and we corrected a lot of mistakes, but not until lives were lost and prices were paid."

General Douglas MacArthur's surprise landing at Inchon in September 1950 cut off the North Korean forces fighting along Pusan Perimeter to the south. Then, from 14–19 September, the 2d Battalion spearheaded the 1st Cavalry Division's breakout from the enclave, winning a Distinguished Unit Citation. After a month of rapid northward advance, Copeland's division occupied the North Korean capital, and the North Korean Army was wiped out. He wrote his wife to tell her he would be home by Christmas, but the Chinese had other ideas.

At the end of October 1950 the 8th Cavalry reached Unsan, North Korea, about fifty-five miles from the Chinese border. During the night of 1 November Sergeant Copeland heard what seemed like hundreds of Chinese bugles blowing. They signaled the beginning of an all-out offensive, preceded by heavy rocket, artillery, and mortar attacks. Once the shelling lifted, Chinese cavalry on Mongolian ponies, followed by waves of infantrymen, charged the unit's positions. The 2d Battalion was quickly engulfed and surrounded. Fighting his way through the Chinese encirclement with a small group of soldiers, Copeland was wounded in the head and leg. Nevertheless, after treating a young soldier wounded by shell fragments, Copeland carried the battalion operations sergeant into the safety of the nearby mountains. The next day he managed to get his wounded comrade aboard a truck and then made his way back to U.S. lines.

The 8th Cavalry went into reserve until replacements and rest reconstituted the unit. Then it returned to the fighting, this time near Panmunjom.

In late June 1951 Copeland returned home from Korea. His next duty station was at the Fourth Army headquarters, Fort Sam Houston, Texas, but he had no idea what his assignment would be. Then fate intervened. His old division commander from Korea, Maj. Gen. Hobart R. Gay, spotted Copeland's 1st Cavalry shoulder patch and asked him into his office. His reward for bringing the general up to date on the 1st Cavalry in Korea was an assignment to Texas A&M University on ROTC duty.

While at Texas A&M, Copeland successfully completed a precommissioning course but, feeling that he was too old, declined the offer of a commission. Nevertheless, he learned a great deal about the military that helped him throughout his career.

September 1953 found First Sergeant Copeland with the 22d Infantry in Kirch Goens, Germany. Family quarters in Germany were scarce, with sixteen- to eighteen-month waiting lists. Such experiences, together with his unaccompanied tours and long family separations, finally convinced him to leave the Army in 1954. Waiting as a civilian to enroll for the spring semester at Texas A&M, Copeland had second thoughts. "In those days you could be out of the Army up to ninety days and then you could come back with your rank, if you could find a vacancy with that rank." Copeland found a vacancy with the 4th Tank Battalion at Fort Hood and was soon back in the Army.

Resuming his career, Copeland served in the 4th Tank Battalion until 1957. He used his training and experience in operations and intelligence as the battalion operations sergeant until December 1956, when he was assigned as the battalion sergeant major. At



the time, the battalion sergeant major “handled administration for the commander, met with the company first sergeants, and checked the police of the area.” It was not until later that sergeants major actively supervised training and maintenance and “got out with the troops.” This change in approach to the role of the sergeant major was officially recognized when the Army Chief of Staff, General Harold K. Johnson, approved the position of command sergeant major in 1967.

When his unit was moved from Fort Hood to Fort Polk, Louisiana, in 1957, Copeland decided that he wanted to transfer out of the Leesville area. “I [had] never asked for a transfer into or out of a unit before, but this was the time I could better my family by moving them out of the area.” He requested a second assignment to ROTC duty, this time at Centenary College in Shreveport, Louisiana. Given primarily administrative duties, he soon enrolled in typing classes and took advantage of the opportunity to take classes in mathematics and English. The latter he considered helpful, because of his “lack of proficiency and Texas long, drawn-out drawl,” at least according to his professor. In addition to the college courses, he furthered his military education by completing Unit and/or Company Commanders Extension Courses. In turn, his training in operations was of great value in organizing classroom instruction and summer training for the cadets. Copeland derived much satisfaction years later when he met many of his former ROTC cadets as colonels and generals.

In 1958 the Copelands found themselves on their way back to Germany. This time, Copeland was assigned as the first sergeant of Troop B, 8th Cavalry Squadron, 8th Infantry Division, in Sandhoffen, Germany. The Army had just authorized the new pay grades of E-8 and E-9, and

Copeland was considered for promotion to E-8 soon after he arrived in the unit. He had one day’s notice for a division promotion board, and his unit was training in the field when he found out about it. Every candidate for the one E-8 slot was in a Class A uniform except for Copeland, who came straight to the promotion board from the field. He recalls telling the board president, “It wasn’t feasible to change clothes before coming here to meet the deadline this morning. I chose to appear before the board in field uniform and take my chances.” Copeland impressed the board with his knowledge of operations and his efforts to continue his education while at Centenary College, particularly the precommissioning courses. At the end of the interview, he informed the board that they were “facing the best soldier and that he should get the promotion.” At the next day’s formation, when his company commander read his promotion orders, Copeland learned that the promotion board agreed with his self-assessment.

The fact that Copeland was working as a first sergeant proved a decided advantage. The E-8 and E-9 eligibility requirements specified that an NCO had to have been in a first sergeant or sergeant major position. But many NCOs avoided those jobs, “doing all sorts and manner of things to evade troop duty.” By staying with troop units, Copeland gave himself an edge over many other candidates. Copeland didn’t keep his first sergeant rank for long, however. Within a year, his squadron commander selected him to be the squadron sergeant major.

Sergeant Major Copeland remained in Germany until November 1962, when he was assigned as sergeant major of 2d Battalion, 37th Armor, 2d Armored Division, at Fort Hood, Texas. In June 1963 he became the division sergeant major. As with his promotion to E-8, he competed with three other sergeants major for the position. As before,



Copeland (left) with troops of the 1st Infantry Division in Vietnam.

Copeland was not shy about telling the division commander that he was the best man for the job. He also pointed out that he had fought with the division in World War II.

Skipping over the combat command (brigade) level and moving up to the division level, Copeland made a significant jump. As a squadron sergeant major, he had worked with five first sergeants, all of the same branch; the division had thirty-four sergeants major of several branches. As a squadron sergeant major, he could escape many administrative duties that kept him at his desk and get out to see “Private Joe Snuffy”

training in the field or performing maintenance in the motor pool. The division job mandated more paperwork. But, just as he had done as a first sergeant and platoon sergeant, Copeland did not hesitate to learn from others. “Going back to my copy-cat days, in the absence of any formal schooling in the duties of the sergeant major, I watch a guy who’s been successful. I’m going to emulate this guy.” In this case he took as a model the sergeant major of the 8th Division, who held regular meetings with the sergeants major of the divisional units to establish an informal NCO support channel



that paralleled and complemented the officer chain of command. Copeland did the same.

Previously, as a squadron sergeant major, Copeland had hoped that he “might make it up to brigade or combat command.” As a division sergeant major, he never had any desire to be a corps sergeant major, because at the division level “is where all the action is.” For the next seven years he served several times in that position. He worked as the 2d Armored Division sergeant major until 1966, then moved back to Germany—for the third time—as the sergeant major, 2d Brigade, 4th Armored Division, and later as the division sergeant major. In 1969 he followed his third tour in Germany with his third tour in a combat unit, the 1st Infantry Division in South Vietnam.

Copeland served one tour in Vietnam, split between the “Big Red One” and the 4th Infantry Division. As the division sergeant major of the 1st Infantry Division beginning in September 1969, he was the eyes and ears of the commanding general regarding the enlisted troops. He accompanied the general on inspection trips. While the general received his briefings, Copeland walked around the fire base, talking with the enlisted soldiers and making evaluations: “Are they properly fed? Do they have the equipment? Do they have ammunition? Do they have weapons? Are they operable? How’s their morale? How can I support you?”

Having a senior noncommissioned officer accompany the young soldier on his mission out in the field seemed to boost his morale. So Copeland encouraged the sergeants major of the division to get out to visit the troops whenever possible. “They should let the young soldier know that they’re in the area and their primary purpose of being there is to support that combat soldier and make sure he gets everything that he needs to accomplish his mission and [to assure him] that he is not the only one

directly involved in the war.” He stressed that “the sergeant major’s primary mission in life” was to ensure that everyone supporting those soldiers in the jungle did “everything humanly possible to make the mission as easy and comfortable as possible.”

Copeland found the young soldiers and NCOs in Vietnam no different from those of World War II or Korea. However, there was a difference in the soldiers’ attitude toward the war. Soldiers in Vietnam felt, “I’m the bait. I’m the guy that’s going to take the blow in the jungles of Vietnam.” Television news and newspapers let them know that the entire nation was sharply divided about the war. The divisiveness took a heavy toll on the soldiers’ morale. “The big challenge for NCOs at all levels, from division right on down to fire team leader, is to keep the morale of the soldier boosted. If his morale is good, his fighting ability is good. If his morale is low, you have a problem.” He firmly believed that “one way to do that is to show him that he is not alone in the jungle and although you won’t be at his side day and night, you are his prime supporter.”

The 1st Infantry Division phased out of Vietnam during the middle of Copeland’s tour. He then became the sergeant major of the 4th Infantry Division, then operating in Vietnam’s central highlands. Later in his tour, Copeland went into Cambodia with the division.

Before finishing his one-year tour in Vietnam, Copeland learned that he was under consideration for Sergeant Major of the Army. Having been previously considered for the position in 1968 when George Dunaway was selected, he felt that the opportunity had passed and that he would retire in 1972. There were five other sergeants major under consideration, all of whom had been recommended for the position by a general officer and had been interviewed by their chain of command. That summer the Chief



of Staff, General William C. Westmoreland, interviewed the top five candidates including Copeland. As the only one then stationed in Vietnam, Copeland was asked about conditions in Vietnam and what was happening in the 4th Division area of operations. For the first time at a promotion board, he did not state that he was the best man for the job. He knew that all five candidates for such a prestigious position had to be the best or they would not have been interviewed. Instead his responses were factual and direct. At the conclusion of the interview, he left a phone number where he could be reached and went home to Huntsville, Texas, for a short leave.

He had no sooner arrived home when he learned that he had been selected to be the next Sergeant Major of the Army. At the time, Copeland was instructed to return to Vietnam at the end of his leave to complete his tour. While there as the Sergeant Major of the Army designee, he was to "visit as many troops as feasible, from the DMZ [Demilitarized Zone] to the Mekong Delta." He found the responsibility and the high expectation for him in Vietnam and in Washington both humbling and a source of pride.

At his swearing-in ceremony the entire Copeland family, except one, attended—wife Ann, daughters Dorothy and Paula, and son Russell. He elected not to pull his other son Robert out of classes at Sam Houston University, a decision he later regretted: "I should have done that because there is only one swearing-in ceremony and there's only one picture of that ceremony." He told the Secretary of the Army, "Mr. Secretary, you all have chosen the proudest soldier in our Army. You may not have chosen the best, but you have chosen the proudest, and I plan to carry on to the best of my ability."

Copeland assumed office in October 1970 during a turbulent time for the Army. His task was to further institutionalize the

office he had inherited from Wooldridge and Dunaway. Although there was little danger of the office's being abolished, Copeland faced attempts to erode the influence of the office within the Army staff and to reduce his access to the Chief of Staff. Soon after his swearing-in, a colonel from the general staff came into his office and announced that he would be Copeland's rater. As a division sergeant major, he had been rated by a general officer; to be rated by a colonel represented something of a demotion. Copeland, considering himself "number one here and not working to obtain a rating," had little personal concern over the rating scheme—"Gee, you know as far as this soldier is concerned, I don't care. Any officer can rate me." However, he also knew that it would affect the image of the Office of the Sergeant Major of the Army, reduce its influence within the Army staff, and reduce his access to the Chief of Staff. Sergeants major at the division, corps, and major command levels were rated by the commanding general for whom they directly worked. In sum, Copeland felt so strongly about the issue that he threatened to resign. "I will have no alternative except to go to the Chief of Staff and inform him that this old sergeant feels that this is not the image he would like to create among the NCOs of our Army and I would just as soon move on." In the end, the Army decided not to rate the SMA at all.

Copeland felt that his performance in the new office was being watched very closely and that it would have a bearing on the decision to continue the office. His professionalism and unwillingness to be "political" earned him the respect of General Westmoreland, who told his major field commanders, "Copeland is the best we have and it would behoove you to pay attention to what he has to say." A young major at the Pentagon learned that the hard way. Pete Dawkins, part of the Chief of

Staff's committee on the all-volunteer Army, was tasked to develop new haircut standards. At his briefing to the Chief of Staff, he realized to his embarrassment that he had not consulted with Copeland over this primarily enlisted matter. Copeland later related, "Pete didn't get his way because I didn't agree with him on the haircuts. Had we coordinated beforehand, we would have come to a determination before the briefing." The Chief of Staff sided with the SMA on the issue, which demonstrated the credibility and prestige that Copeland brought to the office. Many other officers, both in the field and on the Army staff, soon saw the SMA office as an asset once they realized that Copeland "was not out there to tattletale, but to assist."

Although not formally rated, Copeland's performance was nevertheless watched closely not only by the Army, but by civilians as well. Everything he did, every public appearance, seemed to be closely scrutinized, not so much to determine the future of his career but the future of the SMA's office. Copeland quickly felt the stress as he "tried to overcome and improve the image of his office." One of the things that he had to overcome was the adverse publicity created by the open mess scandal. People who knew nothing else about the Office of the Sergeant Major of the Army knew about the scandal, which was coming to public attention during Copeland's term of office.

Copeland received broad guidance from General Westmoreland when he assumed office. Perhaps thinking of the damage to the office during the open mess affair, the chief told Copeland not to accept gifts of more than nominal value from soldiers while visiting units in the field. Second, he was not to tread on the toes of the Deputy Chief of Staff for Personnel (DCSPER). "Oh, by the way," Westmoreland added, "I have a three-star general. His name is Lieutenant General Dutch Kerwin. His department handles

assignments, transfers, clubs, messes, you name it, for the Army. I prefer that you do not get involved in that sort of thing."

Such strictures made life difficult for Copeland, as he received many calls from commanders requesting that a certain sergeant major be assigned to them or requests from sergeants major for assignments to a certain unit or area. But in keeping with the CSA's directive, he forwarded such requests to the DCSPER and let that staff handle assignments. By refusing to interfere with the business of the DCSPER, Copeland prevented the "old boy network" from conflicting with formal personnel assignment policy, one of General Johnson's main concerns when he created the Office of the Sergeant Major of the Army in 1966. Yet at the same time, it prevented the SMA from playing a role in an area where he did have certain natural responsibilities.

The paramount issues in the Army when Copeland assumed office were the drawdown of the Army in the course of Vietnamization, the change from a conscript Army to an all-volunteer Army, and the need to upgrade the Noncommissioned Officer Education System. As Copeland stated, "One of the most gratifying accomplishments during my tenure" was the activation of the U.S. Army Sergeants Major Academy at Fort Bliss, Texas. He attended the first graduating class and was asked if he would like to become commandant after leaving the SMA's office. However, the law requiring him to retire at the conclusion of his term precluded him from considering the post.

The shift to an all-volunteer Army required a change in the way that NCOs dealt with soldiers. In the conscript Army, Copeland pointed out, "we could fire a soldier, give him an undesirable discharge, boot him out of the Army, and then all we had to do was ask for a replacement. So another one

was drafted off the street.” Under the all-volunteer Army, NCOs had to put themselves into the place of young soldiers the Army recruited. How would he or she want to be treated? Although more was expected of such volunteers, they also merited more respect and consideration for their career commitments. Despite the Chief of Staff’s directive to “recruit, train, and retain an all-volunteer Army by 30 June 1973,” many NCOs resisted the changes needed to carry out that directive. Although never established as policy or even communicated as a veiled threat, such attitudes often became discriminators when selecting NCOs for the post-Vietnam reduction-in-force.

In the effort to recruit and retain an all-volunteer force, Copeland oversaw or was involved in several changes to abolish long-standing Army traditions. The Army virtually ended bed checks, upgraded barracks, and changed enlistment and reenlistment policies and options to attract new recruits and induce soldiers to reenlist. Civilian contractors took over the onerous chore of KP. Copeland, in his travels to units, was the “point man” who carried the message to the soldiers. He knew that “The Army Wants to Join You” slogan and philosophy had become a lightning rod for NCOs who felt that the changes brought about by the all-volunteer Army undermined discipline. As Copeland and many others saw it, “The Army Wants to Join You” meant “We’ve got to be more lenient on the style of the haircut, their dress, and—I hate to say this—discipline.”

During this period of transition, Congress saw Copeland as the soldiers’ representative and spokesman. Although he never testified before any committee of Congress, he did frequently receive calls requesting his opinion on the status of the all-volunteer Army: “How is recruiting coming along? What do you see in the field? What do you think some of the soldiers’



SMA Copeland visits a young soldier.

frustrations are? Are you going to be able to obtain an all-volunteer force?”

Ironically, at the same time the Army was trying to entice young men and women to enlist voluntarily, it was forcing other soldiers out of the Army as part of the post-Vietnam drawdown. Many of those asked to leave were career soldiers and NCOs with twelve to fourteen years of service and one or more combat tours in Vietnam. Copeland, in the course of briefing the Chief of Staff, General Creighton W. Abrams, related to him that the reduction-in-force was one of his most frustrating challenges. Unlike officers, NCOs were released without the benefit of any separation pay to ease their transition into civilian life.

The Chief of Staff asked him if he had any experience dealing with the reduction-in-force after World War II or the Korean War.





Mrs. Ann Copeland looks in on a patient at Irwin Army Hospital, Fort Riley, Kansas, 1971.

One of the most galling policies after those two wars, Copeland noted, was the practice of allowing officers to serve in NCO slots at the reduced grade so that they could fulfill their length of service requirements for full retirement benefits. This forced NCOs out of the Army. Worst of all, Copeland felt, was that the former officer often only held the NCO slot, but did not actually work in it. "Other NCOs had to pick up the slack, without the pay or promotion that went with it. I cited myself as

being one of those—the way I put it—victims." General Abrams apparently followed Copeland's advice not to repeat that mistake, because "although NCOs were released, it was not because a former officer took up his slot."

SMA Copeland spent at least 50 percent of his time in the field visiting soldiers and units, usually accompanying the Chief of Staff. If visiting a unit without the Chief of Staff, he would always advise the post commander of his itinerary. Commanders used



SMA Copeland “standing tall” at his last official Army formation during his retirement ceremony at Fort Myer, Virginia, June 1973.

many of these office calls to express their feelings about issues such as the all-volunteer Army. Through the SMA, commanders could share their feelings with the Chief of Staff without their being filtered by the intervening commands. The SMA's direct pipeline to the CSA also worked well for the soldiers. Complaints or comments on issues that normally would never reach the SMA's office reached him directly as he visited soldiers in the field or garrison.

Copeland did not confine his visits to active units; General Westmoreland told him not to forget National Guard and Army Reserve units. As always, visits to reserve units dovetailed well with those to active units, allowing him to visit an active unit during the week and a nearby reserve unit on the weekend. Having never worked directly with reserve units, Copeland gained an appreciation for the role they played in the Army. In addition, a visit by the Sergeant

Major of the Army helped assure reserve component soldiers that they were part of what was now called the "Total Army."

Neither General Abrams nor Sergeant Major Copeland traveled alone. Like his predecessor, the Chief of Staff authorized travel expenses for the Sergeant Major of the Army's wife. To encourage voluntary enlistments and reenlistments, it was now even more critical to make service life more attractive to spouses and families. Ann Copeland thus paid regular visits to wives' groups and post facilities that served the Army families. Copeland later noted that "It was from Ann that I was able to learn, first-hand, some of the frustrations that were going on within families of young soldiers." Unknown to her, these concerns were written into field reports submitted to the Chief of Staff, which brought about needed changes for an increasingly married Army. The Copelands' interest in the Army family did not stop when he left office in 1973. Throughout the next decades, Ann continued to attend meetings which the DCSPER held concerning support for family members, especially those of soldiers deployed overseas. During Operation DESERT SHIELD/DESERT STORM, the sudden and massive overseas deployments of both active and reserve units, as well as the increasing number of single-parent and dual-service families, required detailed family support plans and organizations, and Mrs. Copeland's experience and advice in this area were understandably highly regarded.

Silas Copeland's tour of duty as the Sergeant Major of the Army was due to end in October 1972, after two years in office.

Because of his break in service in 1954, this would mean that he would be a few months short of thirty years for retirement. The acting Chief of Staff, General Bruce Palmer, Jr., accordingly extended his tour until February 1973. Before the end of the year, however, General Abrams took over as Chief of Staff and asked Copeland to remain in office until June 1973, when he turned over the office to Sgt. Maj. Leon Van Autreve.

Silas Copeland had a fulfilling and well-rounded career, spanning three wars, serving on three continents, and witnessing vast changes in the Army. He served in every leadership level available to a noncommissioned officer, from tank commander to platoon sergeant, from first sergeant to sergeant major. As a sergeant major he had worked at the battalion and brigade levels and for four different divisions. In his two years and nine months as Sergeant Major of the Army, he worked for three Chiefs of Staff and oversaw vast changes in the Army as it reduced its strength from 1.3 million soldiers in 1970 to 788,000 in 1973. During this period he helped pioneer the improvements in service life needed to recruit and retain an all-volunteer Army after the draft had ended. His tour saw the first class of graduates from the U.S. Army Sergeants Major Academy and the strengthening of the Noncommissioned Officer Education System. Finally, his actions as Sergeant Major of the Army institutionalized the office and made it an integral part of the decision-making process in the Pentagon. After thirty years of service, Copeland and his wife returned to Texas, there to reside in Huntsville in a well-earned retirement.



## Assignments

1942	Inducted into service, Huntsville, Texas, and Basic Training, St. Petersburg, Florida
1942-45	Refueling specialist, Base Squadron, Biggs Army Airfield, Texas
1945	Tank Commander and Platoon Sergeant, Company E, 66th Armored Regiment, 2d Armored Division, Germany
1945-50	Operations and Intelligence Sergeant, 67th Tank Battalion and 82d Reconnaissance Battalion, 2d Armored Division, Fort Hood, Texas
1950-51	Operations Sergeant, Reconnaissance and Intelligence Platoon Sergeant, 2d Battalion, 8th Cavalry Regiment, 1st Cavalry Division, Japan, Korea
1951-53	Assistant Instructor, ROTC, Texas A&M University, College Station, Texas
1953-54	First Sergeant, 2d Battalion, 22d Infantry, 4th Infantry Division, Germany
1954-57	Operations Sergeant, Sergeant Major, 4th Tank Battalion, 1st Armored Division, Fort Hood, Texas
1957-58	Instructor, ROTC, Centenary College, Shreveport, Louisiana
1958-59	First Sergeant, Troop B, 8th Cavalry Squadron, 8th Infantry Division, Germany
1960-62	Sergeant Major, 8th Cavalry Squadron, 8th Infantry Division, Germany
1962-63	Sergeant Major, 2d Battalion, 37th Armor, 2d Armored Division, Fort Hood, Texas
1963-66	Division Sergeant Major, 2d Armored Division, Fort Hood
1966-68	Brigade Sergeant Major, 2d Brigade, 4th Armored Division, Germany
1968-69	Division Sergeant Major, 4th Armored Division, Germany
1969-70	Division Sergeant Major, 1st Infantry Division, Vietnam
1970	Division Sergeant Major, 4th Infantry Division, Vietnam
1970-73	Sergeant Major of the Army

## Selected Decorations and Awards

Distinguished Service Medal  
 Legion of Merit  
 Bronze Star Medal with V Device with four Oak Leaf Clusters  
 Meritorious Service Medal  
 Distinguished Flying Cross  
 Air Medal  
 Army Commendation Medal with one Oak Leaf Cluster  
 Good Conduct Medal  
 American Campaign Medal  
 European Campaign Medal  
 World War II Victory Medal  
 Army of Occupation Medal (Germany)  
 National Defense Service Medal  
 Korean Service Medal  
 Vietnam Service Medal  
 United Nations Korean Service Medal  
 Republic of Vietnam Campaign Medal  
 Combat Infantryman Badge



# Leon L. Van Autreve

Leon L. Van Autreve was born in Eeklo, Belgium, on 29 January 1920. His family moved to the United States when he was very young, first settling in Montana and then moving to Delphos, Ohio. He attended an eight-grade elementary school followed by four years at St. John's Catholic High School in Delphos. In the evening, he worked as a projectionist in the local theater. Like many recent immigrants, the senior Van Autreves had a special appreciation for their adopted homeland and expressed their patriotism by flying the American flag every day. The elder Van Autreve had been the second most highly decorated Belgian Army soldier in World War I. Perhaps these two factors motivated his son to enlist in the Ohio National Guard in 1938. The need for additional income during the Depression was certainly another reason.

Private Van Autreve served in Headquarters Company, 148th Infantry, in Spencerville, Ohio. The first sergeant assigned him as the company clerk, because he could "recognize a typewriter and was therefore highly qualified." The guard trained for only two hours per week and con-

sequently, "one almost had to relearn what had been learned at each session." There was no educational system and the rate of promotion was glacial. "Once you became an NCO, you had to wait until someone died to get promoted." During field training, Van Autreve took turns with other soldiers hauling around a water-cooled, .30-caliber machine gun mounted on bicycle wheels. Training resources were so scarce that no one actually got to fire the weapon.

Van Autreve left the 148th Infantry in 1940 when he landed a job with the Long Island Railroad and later with the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad in Lima, Ohio. In October he was inducted into the Army. Although he was unhappy about leaving his girlfriend, his hometown in nearby Delphos was patriotic and supportive. "When you received your draft notice, people would clap you on the back and say, 'Hey, man, that's all right.'" At the time, none of the draftees called up with Van Autreve knew what the term of service would be. After the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, "we thought that the war was going to last only three or four weeks and we would wipe the





Van Autreve as a young soldier.

Japanese off the face of the map. We were not aware on the 7th of December of the consequences of the Pearl Harbor attack. Everybody wanted to go, immediately, to get it over with. Unfortunately it did not last three or four weeks.”

After he spent several weeks in-processing, Van Autreve went to Fort Belvoir, Virginia, for eight weeks of basic training. Like most other trainees, he lived in two-story wooden barracks that contained rifle racks, bunks, and little else. Unlike in today’s barracks with triple-locked arms rooms, recruits then could take their rifle out to practice the techniques they had learned on the range. Van Autreve put his marksmanship skills into practice soon after Pearl Harbor. When on guard duty one night, he and a fellow guard

saw a car without headlights near their post. Thinking that “the Japanese were intruding into the confines of Fort Belvoir,” they shot at it. Fortunately, they missed the two cadre members who were trying to sneak back onto post after curfew. When brought before their battalion commander, they were terrified and thought that they “were going to be lined up against the wall and shot.” Apparently attributing the incident to the invasion “jitters” prevalent all over the country, the colonel did not punish them.

Enlisted soldiers rarely saw officers, because NCOs conducted every facet of their training, and lived, ate, and slept with them. Van Autreve’s incentive to become a sergeant was not monetary, but came from the desire to have the comfort and status of his own room at the end of the barracks. “Besides the private room, I didn’t have to clean latrines. I didn’t have to go on KP. Oh, I was in ‘hog heaven.’ I’d wear that little corporal stripe down there like a wheel.” The NCOs conducted excellent hands-on training, taking advantage of increased resources available after Pearl Harbor. Van Autreve quickly learned engineer tasks that he would use in combat—demolitions, bridging, and mine-clearing. Engineering was not all he learned. His platoon sergeant set an example of “foot locker counseling,” which Van Autreve emulated later in his career. The sergeant made himself available to his soldiers at night and on weekends in the barracks to answer questions and discuss the day’s training. Noticing that Van Autreve had “fairly decent possibilities as an NCO,” he took the young recruit out to the parade field. There Van Autreve, under the sergeant’s watchful eye, hollered commands across the field to strengthen his command voice.

In January 1942 Van Autreve left Fort Belvoir for Fort Bragg, North Carolina, where he was assigned to the 15th Engineer Battalion, 9th Infantry Division. His recep-

tion at Fort Bragg in the middle of the night impressed him. The mess hall provided food and hot coffee for the half-frozen arriving soldiers. The beds in the barracks were already made. How these newly arriving soldiers were made to feel part of the unit was something he never forgot and always emphasized in the future.

The 15th Engineers conducted hard, realistic unit training in preparation for the upcoming invasion of northwest Africa. Van Autreve's company commander promoted him to sergeant and included him in the two squads attached to the 60th Infantry Regimental Combat Team (RCT) to provide demolition support. The 60th moved to Little Creek, Virginia, for two months to work in an environment resembling that of its initial objective, French Morocco. Sergeant Van Autreve trained fourteen to fifteen hours a day, much of it at night, learning how to destroy pillboxes with pole charges; to sneak up on sentries, using several U.S. and enemy weapons; and to handle small boats. The small-boat training later proved the most valuable.

Van Autreve and a small demolition group shipped out on a destroyer, the USS *Dallas*. The sailors neglected to brief the soldiers about what "general quarters" meant until after their first terrifying encounter with submarines. The chance of being blown out of the water and the unpleasant rolling of the small ship gave the soldiers an edge, however. "We were so sick and tired of being on that destroyer that we would have fought the entire German Army in French Morocco, just to get off." The destroyer's mission was to sail up a river, cross a chain obstacle, and provide demolition support for the landing. The enemy was not the German Army, however, but the French Foreign Legion, which capitulated after three days of fighting. After the landing, Sergeant Van Autreve rejoined his unit, which had the dangerous mission of

defuzing dud shells and breaching minefields. He spent the remainder of his time in North Africa emplacing and removing mines.

Mine removal was every bit as dangerous as fighting with a frontline infantry unit. In fact, many times he found himself in front of them, clearing and marking paths through minefields. Throughout the latter half of the war, the Germans sowed mines liberally and rigged many with booby traps and trip wires. Once, in support of a tank company, he was clearing mines in front of the column. Suddenly the lead U.S. tank encountered a German tank in the road. The two tanks exchanged fire over his head for fifteen minutes, then the battle moved elsewhere.

Nor was the only danger from ground forces. Sergeant Van Autreve and a few of his soldiers once found a water well. They had undressed and begun to take a long overdue bath when a *Luftwaffe* fighter, flying overhead, saw them and dove down in attack. Unsure of the nationality of the out-of-uniform men, the pilot deliberately fired wide and enjoyed himself chasing the naked men across the desert. Terrified at the time, Van Autreve only later could see the humor in the episode. He experienced another problem with his uniform during a mine-clearing operation. Without a helmet, shirt, and tie, he was concentrating intently on locating "bouncing betty" mines and did not see Maj. Gen. George S. Patton's caravan approaching. The general, a stickler for correct uniforms, chewed out Van Autreve until his company commander rescued him.

Sergeant Van Autreve stayed with the 15th Engineers as the 9th Division "Old Reliables" invaded Sicily, redeployed to England, landed in Normandy four days after D-day, and advanced across France. Near the German border, he suffered a relapse of malaria and was placed on a limited assignment. Because he had worked on the railroad before induction into the Army, he found

himself as a train guard watching for pilferers until the end of the war in Europe. After thirty months of duty with combat engineers, he out-processed through Camp "Lucky Strike" in France in July 1945 and was shipped home.

Sergeant Van Autreve left the Army that year, worked for his father for a time, and then enrolled in Ohio Northern University. An automobile accident and a chance meeting with an Army pal, who had become a recruiter, brought him back into the service. "My insurance expired, so economically I was in a bind. Two or three drinks with my buddy resulted in my being reintroduced to the Army. I thought about the good times and the bad times. How am I going to pay off the damage to my car and the possibility of a lawsuit?" He drew an assignment to Fort Knox, Kentucky, for two years and then back to Europe in 1950 for his first peacetime overseas tour. Before he reached his European assignment, a stint working for a moving company while on leave changed his life.

While helping his brother-in-law move a family's furniture, he met Rita Spinoza, originally from Norwich, Connecticut. She was instantly attracted to the thirty-year-old combat veteran whom she invited to dinner, a highly unusual experience for a mover. Thinking that the invitation was merely perfunctory, he wasn't sure if he should show up. When Rita's mother followed up the invitation with a phone call, he accepted. He now realizes, "I was moving into a trap and didn't know it at the time." The trap was sprung—after dating a few months Leon and Rita married in November 1950.

That month the newly married Van Autreves moved to Boeblingen, Germany, where Sergeant Van Autreve reported to Company A, 54th Engineers, for duty as a platoon sergeant. Soon after he arrived, his first sergeant became upset over the lack of volunteers for the NCO academy. Seeing an

opportunity, Van Autreve promptly volunteered, a decision that later "really paid off." He was promoted to E-7, then the highest pay grade, soon after graduation, summoned to the battalion commander's office, and told "You are going to be the First Sergeant of Headquarters Company." Although he considered himself unprepared for the job, he remembered that the colonel, impressed with his performance at the NCO academy, thought otherwise, and his new duties began almost immediately.

Unfamiliar with the administrative requirements of being a first sergeant, Van Autreve "studied his head off every night" to learn them. The company had a history of disciplinary problems, which First Sergeant Van Autreve determined to solve by his own methods. Rather than send errant soldiers to the commander for nonjudicial punishment, a measure which permanently marred their records, he preferred marching them in full field gear around the quadrangle under his personal supervision. "That reduced our number of problems, dramatically and rapidly." At the same time, remembering his own lack of preparation for the job and the lack of transition with the previous first sergeant, who had been relieved, he trained his own platoon sergeants by rotating them into his slot for a week at a time.

In the early fifties, overseas duty was pleasant in Germany. The exchange rate between the mark and dollar was favorable, and despite the low pay soldiers could afford to enjoy themselves "on the economy." Since relatively few were married, Van Autreve did not have to deal with as many family issues as first sergeants do today. Soldiers needed the commander's permission to marry German nationals, and the low pay also discouraged them from marrying anyone until they advanced in rank. By the end of his four-year tour in Germany, Van Autreve had mastered the intricacies of the first sergeant's



job and was ready to leave Europe for home. He returned to Ohio in an ROTC post at Toledo University.

Master Sergeant Van Autreve owed his assignment to Lt. Col. C. Craig Cannon, his battalion commander in Boeblingen. When the colonel and his wife visited the Van Autreves' quarters, the topic of his reassignment had arisen. Because his father suffered from emphysema, Van Autreve indicated his preference for a duty station near their home in Delphos. With Colonel Cannon's assistance, the ROTC posting was secured, only eighty miles from his parents' home. There, as a senior instructor, Van Autreve taught military history and logistics to cadets of all four years. At the same time, the professor of military science allowed him to take courses at the university, provided he maintained a passing grade average. Van Autreve took advantage of this opportunity, majored in history, and became a member of Phi Alpha Theta, the national history honor society. In fact, over the course of his career, he would accumulate some 140 semester hours from six universities. Between instructing and teaching, he had little free time to enjoy the comfortable living conditions, which included air-conditioned quarters on campus.

From Toledo University, Master Sergeant Van Autreve moved to Fort Knox for an assignment with the Continental Army Command (CONARC) Armor Board. Working in the Engineer Section, he put to good use his combat experience with mines. The section tested a wide variety of mines, determining the best ways to emplace, detect, and ultimately defuze them. When the Army created the NCO "supergrades" of E-8 and E-9, Van Autreve and seven other NCOs competed for one E-8 slot in the section. Although Van Autreve was unsure of his chances, General Bruce C. Clarke, the CONARC commander, remembered that Van Autreve had graduated as the number-one

student at the Constabulary NCO Academy and personally selected him for the E-8 slot. With that promotion, Van Autreve took charge of the Engineer Section.

After two years at the Armor Board, Van Autreve received orders for a one-year unaccompanied tour in Korea. There he served as a company first sergeant in the 8th Engineer Battalion, 1st Cavalry Division, from 1960 to 1961. A steep hill, OP-7, near the company area allowed him to use the same technique he had used in Germany to deal with soldiers guilty of minor infractions. He gave them a choice of nonjudicial punishment by the company commander or a hike up the hill with the first sergeant. As before, most chose the hike over a permanent blemish on their record.

First Sergeant Van Autreve again used his ingenuity to solve a recurrent theft problem. Nearby Korean villagers appeared to be stealing building supplies, vehicles, and anything else not nailed down. When Van Autreve's Christmas lights disappeared, he could take no more. At the time, first sergeants had greater authority than they do today. Van Autreve used his authority to place the nearby village, the "ville," off-limits to his soldiers. The economic impact of his action encouraged the local "mamasan" to ensure that the lights were returned. The problem with petty thievery quickly ended.

Besides disciplinary problems and theft, he had to deal with fights between his soldiers and KATUSAs, venereal disease, and, most frustrating, the constant turnover of personnel. The one-year overseas tour meant that soldiers constantly rotated in and out of the company, making it difficult to keep trained soldiers in key positions. The isolated location of the company required the first sergeant to solve problems himself instead of referring them to higher headquarters. After a year in Korea, Van Autreve

returned home and was assigned to the Engineer Center at Fort Belvoir.

Originally slated for another first sergeant position, he arrived to find it already filled and instead became the senior bridge instructor at the Engineer School. After a year of instructing students in mine warfare and Bailey and treadway bridge construction, he became the sergeant major, E-9, of the supporting 91st Engineer Battalion. His elevation to sergeant major was a triumph over the favoritism evident in promotions and selections. His former unit had supposedly sent his records to the promotion board, but when he appeared before the board, the records were missing. Fortunately, the board president delayed proceeding until Van Autreve's records were found on the post sergeant major's desk, where they had been held up for two days. "Had it not been for the president of the board I would not have become a sergeant major, because he pursued the matter so diligently. You were supposed to play the political program to survive. It was all predicated on someone like the president of that board who feels that you've been maligned and does something about it."

After only a year and a half with the 91st, Sergeant Major Van Autreve was called in by his battalion commander. General Herbert B. Powell, the CONARC commander, would interview him for the position of CONARC sergeant major. Van Autreve was wary. Before the interview, the incumbent sergeant major told him that the job was mainly ceremonial. So he "went in to see the general, saluted, and right off the bat, said, 'Sir, I don't want the job.' He was very gracious and asked me why. I said, 'I've been told that it was primarily ceremonial and I just don't want that kind of job.'" The general told him if he did not want the job, he did not have to take it, and there the matter ended.

While at Fort Belvoir, Sergeant Major Van Autreve saw his battalion load out and

prepare for deployment during the Cuban missile crisis in the fall of 1962. The 91st remained on stand-by status for a week. Although it never deployed, the entire experience provided the battalion some valuable lessons in readying its equipment and personnel for emergency deployments.

In 1963 Van Autreve became a member of a 65-soldier Military Technical Advisory Team (MILTAG), training Indonesian Army units in combat engineering. At the same time the Soviet Air Force was training the Indonesian Air Force, so Van Autreve had the unusual experience of working next to Russian advisers. He was impressed by the average Indonesian soldier, who routinely participated in a variety of rather dangerous training exercises—hurdling over knives, points up, and riding a suspension traverse "slide-for-life" over bayonets and other "very penetrating obstacles." Although he found the work satisfying, he believed that the team did not have enough training in Indonesian customs and language before attempting to advise that country's army. This was a prophetic observation, applicable to the Army's advisory effort a few years later in Vietnam.

In 1964, following his tour in Indonesia, the Army sent Van Autreve back to Germany as sergeant major of the 317th Engineer Battalion, located outside Frankfurt. He was immediately appalled by the lack of discipline and generally poor conditions at McNair Kaserne and confronted several soldiers after his arrival. "Rita and I went to the PX and snack bar," he related. "There was profanity and I told the offending soldier to knock it off. He cursed me and was about to pull a knife on me, when I hit him with a metal tray." Another time they encountered a soldier who was throwing garbage cans at people waiting in line at the theater. "He was either bombed or on dope and had utter disregard for what I told him. I brought this to the



Brigade Sergeant Major Van Autreve of the 20th Engineer Brigade with Vietnamese children.

attention of a passing captain, who said, 'No, I don't want anything to do with this.' Well, that gave me an indication that things were pretty tough." After this incident, he and the battalion commander met with the officers and senior NCOs to determine how best to improve the discipline of the organization. "It took us, by God, four or five months to get that place squared away."

In addition to his duties as sergeant major, Van Autreve became the housing coordinator for Fichstein, responsible for ninety sets of family quarters. Conditions there were also marginal, and it took about three years

for the sergeant major to turn both the unit and the kaserne around. By enforcing standards, eliminating nonproductive NCOs, and making the working and living areas something of which the soldiers could be proud, he slowly improved the morale and readiness of the 317th. As the senior enlisted man in the battalion, he consistently encouraged the commander to spend more time with the soldiers in the field, showing them that he could share some of the misery they experienced, for example, while erecting a bridge in the rain.

In 1966 Van Autreve had his first opportunity for consideration as Sergeant Major of



the Army when the V Corps commander had nominated him ahead of his seniors. The Seventh Army and U.S. Army, Europe (USAREUR), commanders agreed, although ultimately Chief of Staff General Harold K. Johnson chose Sgt. Maj. William O. Wooldridge. Van Autreve thus remained with the 317th Engineers until the following year, when his tour in Germany was over and he volunteered for duty in Vietnam.

Although he was originally slated for duty as sergeant major of the 588th Engineer Battalion, fate sent him elsewhere. During his standard three-day in-processing, the U.S. Army, Vietnam, sergeant major invited him for a drink at the NCO Club. Since Van Autreve had decided to avoid alcohol entirely in the combat zone, he declined. That night the 20th Engineer Brigade sergeant major, when leaving the club, tripped, fell, and broke his leg. Because he would require hospitalization until the end of his tour, Sergeant Major Van Autreve stepped in as his replacement. The 20th was collocated with the 101st Airborne Division. Since the proximity of the two units required Sergeant Major Van Autreve to coordinate frequently with the sergeant major of the 101st, George W. Dunaway, later the second Sergeant Major of the Army, they soon became close friends and developed a high respect for one another.

As the new brigade sergeant major, Van Autreve faced several problems and tackled them with his customary zeal and innovation. He found that his first sergeants tended to remain in the base camps, enjoying hot food and comfortable quarters, while their soldiers manned the "Rome Plow" tractors clearing roads in the jungle and lived with the risk of enemy fire, mines, and jungle predators. The enlisted men "thought that the platoon sergeant was the senior noncommissioned officer in his company. I finally got together with the brigade commander and if we went out to the field, I would take the

helicopter and go back and get the first sergeant, and he went to the field with me. We had to introduce some first sergeants to line troops, and troops to first sergeants."

Another problem, similar to the one he faced in Korea, was the rapid turnover of soldiers on one-year tours of duty. "There was no capability of bonding people, because people came to you, not as a unit, but as one, two, three, or four replacements. They would take a month in order to get indoctrinated, work for five to seven months, and then prepare to go home." Officers stayed in command only six months, "so you're introduced to this company commander and in two or three months you begin to assimilate his philosophy, and then he leaves. Another company commander comes in and you start all over again. My feeling is that resulted in the loss of lives." The turnover in NCOs meant that by the time they learned how to "fight Charlie," it was time to rotate home. For many NCOs and their soldiers, the enemy did not give them five or six months to learn their job.

The disparity between rear areas and combat areas was another concern. Visiting the 1st Logistics Command sergeant major, whom he knew from his Fort Belvoir days, Sergeant Major Van Autreve was amazed by his excellent living conditions—kitchen, lounge, steak, lobster, and Philippine cigars. "We had some soldiers with Special Forces on top of Nui Ba Den. When you go to the top of Nui Ba Den, these guys are not luxuriating with any steak. Their fatigues were ripped and dirty. The only water they had was what they gathered in this huge tarp-like thing in a hole." It was perhaps fortunate that unlike the infantry who were brought back to the rear after an operation, the combat engineers tended to stay in the field continuously, unexposed to such demoralizing contrasts. They also did not have as much of an opportunity to use drugs or become discipline problems.

Halfway through Van Autreve's tour in Vietnam, Sgt. Maj. George W. Dunaway came over from the 101st to visit. Informing him that he, Dunaway, had been selected as the next Sergeant Major of the Army, he also said, "I'm very impressed with your effort and what you do. I'm going to do the best I can to aid you in future." A year later, in 1969, sergeant major Van Autreve found out exactly what that meant. Ready to rotate home from Vietnam, he had not yet seen any orders. He informed Dunaway, who saw to it that he received an assignment to Alaska as the sergeant major, U.S. Army, Alaska (USARAL). "I will never, never stop thanking George Dunaway for what he did for me." Without the assignment to Alaska, where he was rated by a general officer, he felt that he would never have been seriously considered for Sergeant Major of the Army.

The USARAL commanding general, Maj. Gen. Kelly B. Lemmon, had selected Sergeant Major Van Autreve because he was looking for an outsider to work out some of the problems in his command. With the excellent hunting and fishing there, many NCOs had become "homesteaders," remaining on station in Alaska for five or six years. Too many officers and NCOs, Lemmon believed, focused on recreational activities rather than on training. One Friday afternoon at 1400, General Lemmon and his sergeant major went to the main gate; there they wrote down the names of officers and NCOs departing early for a long weekend, leaving their soldiers unsupervised during the duty day. Such direct actions soon gained the attention of troops and commanders alike.

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, junior enlisted councils, 24-hour hotlines, and the open-door policy were prevalent in many units. Although designed to improve the lot of junior enlisted men and junior officers, these innovations often undermined the chain of command and involved senior com-

manders and NCOs in petty problems that should have been solved at a much lower level. Sergeant Major Van Autreve insisted that every soldier who came to him or the commanding general with a problem be accompanied by his first sergeant and company commander. He almost reached the end of his tether when he had to respond to a complaint from a specialist's wife over the size of lettuce heads in one commissary compared to that of another.

As in Germany, he also ran into disciplinary cases at the post theater—drinking, refusal to stand during the National Anthem, and profanity. Correcting such problems took hard work and persistence. During his four years in Alaska, Van Autreve tightened NCO standards, meeting with them once a month to discuss problems. NCOs were now expected to stay in the company area until the end of the duty day and to be available for soldiers after duty hours and on weekends. He reviewed personnel records to find homesteaders, whom he reassigned. With two infantry brigades and several supporting artillery battalions in the command, combat engineer Van Autreve also hit the books to learn everything he could about the other arms. Before visiting a unit, he gave it twenty-four hours' notice so that it could prepare. He also used the same time to brush up on the organization and missions of the particular unit, always writing down five or six key questions to ask soldiers.

Problems aside, Van Autreve enjoyed his tour in Alaska. Soldiers trained in some of the most arduous conditions possible, where temperature extremes made everything difficult and one mistake could be fatal. Such situations made the soldier in Alaska one of the best trained in the Army. While always teaching others, Van Autreve also found he constantly had new things to learn. One of the contingency missions for USARAL was rescuing survivors from air-



Van Autreve takes the oath of office of Sergeant Major of the Army. Standing beside him is General Abrams.

planes that crashed while flying the polar route. Thus Van Autreve, then fifty-two, undertook parachute training to prepare himself for the mission, or at least to better understand what the soldier in his command had to endure.

In 1970 Sergeant Major Van Autreve was considered again for selection as Sergeant Major of the Army. When Silas Copeland received the nod, Van Autreve thought that he would finish his career in Alaska in 1974. However, he was lucky the third time around. Lt. Gen. Melvin Zais, commanding general of the Third U.S. Army, accompanied Van Autreve to his 1973 interview with the Chief of Staff, General Creighton W. Abrams. Before the interview, Zais told Van Autreve, "I personally think that you would do an excellent job but you

have never been a division sergeant major." Van Autreve asked, "General, how does an engineer become a division sergeant major?" At the interview General Abrams asked only one question, "If you were Chief of Staff of the Army, what would you do?" He told him, "Well, I would ensure the restoration of the noncommissioned officer corps to its rightful position. Give . . . [the NCO] the authority to act and if he can't do it and cut the mustard, get rid of him." Expecting a third rejection after what he thought was the world's shortest interview, he was surprised to learn of his selection. He should not have been surprised—his forceful and innovative actions when dealing with severe discipline problems in Germany and Alaska, as well as his efforts to increase standards among the NCO corps, had made him the ideal man to help the Chief of Staff solve the Army's post-Vietnam problems.

After his swearing-in ceremony and a very short transition with his predecessor, Silas Copeland, Van Autreve began to work on what he saw as his highest priority, increasing the standards of the Army's noncommissioned officer corps. He met with a DCSPER staff officer who gave him twenty NCO personnel files, all for sergeants major, all containing numerous Articles 15 and courts martial. Van Autreve deleted the names and personal information on them, made copies, and when speaking to groups of NCOs, would throw the copies out into the audience, saying, "It's your fault that you allow these people to survive." Then, accompanied by personnel experts, he would answer any questions the NCOs had. After a while, NCOs knew "what was coming and they'd start ducking, because I'd throw the files out there and I'd really get hostile about the fact we tolerated those incompetent people, who survived the system and became sergeants major."

The new SMA also worked to eliminate favoritism in the NCO assignment



process. When he began his tour, he found in the basement office of the Pentagon “a guy who carried a list of seven sergeants major who were the ‘turnarounds.’ You could guarantee that those people were just going to replace one another in choice assignments as they moved back and forth across the country.” When the Office of Personnel Operations became the Military Personnel Center (MILPERCEN), this process came into the open and ceased. Also, the authority given to Sergeant Major of the Army Dunaway to review proposed selections of command sergeants major became a powerful tool in Van Autreve’s hands for eliminating favoritism.

Unlike his predecessors, Van Autreve did not receive guidance from the Chief of Staff soon after he took office. “I’d been there about three or four weeks and I’m getting a little disturbed because the General hadn’t sent for me yet. The advice I had gotten was that, ‘The General will send for you when he wants to see you. Do not intrude.’” Finally, the new SMA met the chief in the hallway and asked about the matter. Surprised that he hadn’t come in earlier, General Abrams quickly placed his SMA on the “immediate access” list. Van Autreve later learned that although the chief had directed a major to report on what the SMA was doing, the officer had failed to forward the information to the chief’s office. When he saw the results, Abrams’ only guidance was, “Just keep doing what you’re doing.”

Although SMA Van Autreve had direct access to both the Chief of Staff and the Vice Chief of Staff, he often preferred not to go to that level because he “felt that 95 percent of the problems I encountered in the field I should be able to take care of by going to action officers.” Most of the problems he heard about from his travels and phone calls to his office were not caused by high-level policies that required the atten-

tion of the Chief of Staff. Guidance from the experts in the particular field, who could call the affected unit, was usually enough to solve the problem.

Given the state of the Army after the war in Vietnam, Sergeant Major of the Army Van Autreve heard a continuous series of complaints as he traveled to Army units. Unfortunately, young soldiers had become accustomed to bypassing their chain of command, as Van Autreve had experienced in Alaska. Twenty-four-hour hotlines, junior enlisted and junior officer councils, and the open-door policies were often overloaded by petty complaints that could have been solved more efficiently at a much lower level. Van Autreve found that “soldiers had been led to believe that they didn’t have to talk to non-commissioned officers. We had to reinforce and kind of reinvent the wheel from the standpoint of the NCO corps.” To gain a more accurate view of the pulse of the Army, he would, after talking to groups of soldiers, talk one-on-one with Soldiers of the Month, NCOs of the Month, and NCOs of the Quarter, that is, some of the most dedicated enlisted men. Once he got them to relax and open up, he was able to tap into the perspectives of soldiers who were most apt to put the needs of the institution before their own personal wants.

Back in his office, Van Autreve handled complaints flooding in by telephone and mail. In most cases he referred them back to the soldier’s first sergeant or sergeant major, whom the soldier had usually bypassed. This approach reinforced the authority of the NCOs at the unit level and gave the SMA office time to handle such problems. A typical complaint was the lack of transportation in Alaska. When soldiers turned in their automobiles for shipment to the lower forty-eight states a few weeks before leaving, they were left with no personal transportation. For example, walking to the commissary at thirty

or forty degrees below zero was an extreme hardship for such soldiers and their families. Having served in Alaska, Van Autreve could appreciate the problem and, as SMA, draw attention to it.

General Abrams reinforced the success of Van Autreve's predecessors in persuading the Army staff to include the SMA in decisions affecting soldiers. In one case the chief asked SMA Van Autreve to listen in on a major briefing on moving missiles out of Alaska. The briefing officer covered the difficulties of moving equipment and the details of its transport. When General Abrams asked Van Autreve what he thought of the briefing, he replied, "Well sir, we haven't discussed the people problem." Van Autreve later recalled that "General Abrams hit the table so hard, exclaiming, 'That's exactly the point. We spent hours talking about missiles, but we haven't spent five minutes talking about the people who are going to be displaced. Where are they going and how are they going to get there?'"

Although Sergeant Major Van Autreve learned a great deal from official Department of Defense and Department of the Army briefings, he learned more by talking directly to action officers and noncommissioned officers who dealt with daily issues. Not as concerned about making an impression, they were more candid; in that informal situation, they often passed on more detailed information, often not included in their briefings to the Chief of Staff. In addition, at this lower level, they dealt with problems and issues impacting more on the soldier, while the Chief of Staff himself tended to focus on those which affected the entire Army.

One issue that the SMA had to resolve was that of MOS reclassification. As the Army reduced its strength after Vietnam, it required soldiers, particularly NCOs, to change from overstrength to understrength MOSs to qualify for promotion. In general,

the reclassifications were from noncombat to combat MOSs and caused disruptions when, for example, an administrative NCO (71L) suddenly became an infantryman (11B). On his tours of Army posts, the SMA fielded numerous complaints regarding the changes, and it was his job to respond in laymen's terms.

As Sergeant Major of the Army, Van Autreve's greatest challenge was the "reincarnation of the NCO corps." Besides the reclassification of MOSs, the Army initiated the Qualitative Management Program to weed out substandard NCOs in the course of reducing enlisted strength. The SMA received much bitter correspondence from wives whose NCO husbands had told them that their career was on track, when in fact the NCO had major problems he had not disclosed. Such communications put the SMA in a delicate position. The direct approach might well lead to marital problems, compounding an already difficult situation. Instead, Van Autreve tried to contact the NCO's sergeant major, who in turn encouraged the sergeant to talk to his wife. But such problems had always afflicted the Army in periods of demobilization and downsizing, and often there were no easy answers.

As part of the rejuvenation of the NCO corps, Van Autreve gave NCOs more voice in command decisions, reduced the Army's reliance on soldiers' councils, increased professional standards for NCOs, developed the Noncommissioned Officer Education System, and encouraged NCOs to have the moral courage to police their own ranks. His tour also saw an increased emphasis on training. Standards were raised and units encouraged to use their training time more efficiently. While on the rifle range, soldiers not firing at the moment trained in another skill. The use of multiechelon training allowed battalions to exercise on one level while their unengaged companies, platoons, and squads

trained on different tasks. The resulting decentralized instruction forced NCOs to take more responsibility for training their squads, sections, and crews; improved their skills; and increased the respect they received from their own soldiers.

As did his predecessors, Sergeant Major Van Autreve had numerous opportunities to talk to members of Congress, in both informal discussions and formal testimony before the Senate Armed Services Committee. Many of his acquaintances were committee members who were instrumental in improving Army pay and benefits. As the Office of the Sergeant Major of the Army became more firmly established, members of Congress relied more heavily on the SMAs for information concerning the enlisted soldier. The SMA and his wife also had several opportunities to visit the White House. When Presidents Richard M. Nixon and Gerald Ford presented posthumous Medals of Honor, Rita Van Autreve consoled the wives of senior officials as well as concerned family members. Her husband said later, "Rita, for thirty minutes, had a far more demanding job than I had, because afterwards, they will talk about the wife of the Sergeant Major of the Army."

The role of the SMA's wife became important enough that by 1972 the Chief of Staff, General Abrams, decided that every SMA should be married. Earlier, during Dunaway's tenure, the Army provided travel funds for the SMA's wife because of her important role in family support matters. Rita Van Autreve traveled with her husband on all of his trips in the United States, continuously meeting with groups of Army wives and becoming a polished speaker. She often established bonds with soldiers' wives by reminding them that she too had once been the wife of a junior enlisted soldier and that she understood their problems. As the all-volunteer Army became stabilized, with



At his retirement ceremony SMA Van Autreve is congratulated by his successor, SMA William G. Bainbridge (left) and Chief of Staff General Frederick C. Weyand (center).

its increasing number of married soldiers, addressing the concerns of the family became critical. A soldier who felt that his family was suffering needlessly because of his Army service would not likely reenlist. Rita Van Autreve was one important answer to this growing need.

Van Autreve had always considered the two-year SMA tour too short, believing that an occupant was only beginning to hit his stride after two years. He personally would have liked another year, but also believed that after three years "the length of service takes a toll. Pretty soon you're getting short with your answers. You're not responding like you should, because you're tired. You



know, you're wearing out," adding that "when I was Sergeant Major of the 317th Engineers, I was there a bit too long." Many senior noncommissioned officers also requested that Sergeant Major Van Autreve serve another year. However, General Frederick C. Weyand, who replaced General Abrams after his death in 1974, decided to keep the SMA tour at two years. In addition, General Abrams had already extended Van Autreve's time in service past thirty years so that he could serve a full two years as SMA.

When Sergeant Major Van Autreve retired on 30 June 1975 with over thirty-one years of Army service, he could look back on his tour as Sergeant Major of the Army with great satisfaction. The NCO corps had regained much of the stature it had lost during the war in Vietnam. The Army's leadership reestablished the NCO chain of com-

mand, tightened NCO standards, expanded the NCO education system, and, as part of the overall reduction in force, forced out marginal NCOs. His two years had also seen improvements in training and equipment as the Army regained its focus after ten years of fighting a low-intensity war of attrition in Vietnam. As SMA Van Autreve noted, "No Sergeant Major of the Army can say that he really *did* anything. He can say he contributed to an accomplishment." Nevertheless, Sergeant Major of the Army Van Autreve made significant contributions to the rejuvenation of the NCO corps. His insistence on uncompromising standards for NCOs, his constant efforts to see troop units firsthand, and his work with Army staff action officers all ensured that the necessary policies were implemented to put the noncommissioned officer back into the chain of command.

## Assignments

1938–40	Clerk, Headquarters and Headquarters Company (HHC), 148th Infantry, Ohio Army National Guard, Spencerville, Ohio
1941	Basic Engineer Training, Fort Belvoir, Virginia
1941	185th Engineer Battalion, Fort Campbell, Kentucky
1942–44	15th Engineer Battalion (Combat), 9th Infantry Division, Fort Bragg, North Carolina; North Africa; Sicily; Europe
1945	Headquarters, 723d Railway Operations Battalion, Europe
1946–48	Student, Ohio Northwestern University (break in service, 1949–50)
1950–54	Platoon Sergeant, First Sergeant, HHC, 54th Engineer Battalion, Germany
1954–58	Senior Instructor, ROTC, University of Toledo, Toledo, Ohio
1958–60	Member, Continental Army Command Armor Board, Fort Knox, Kentucky
1960–61	First Sergeant, Company B, 8th Engineer Battalion, 1st Cavalry Division, Republic of Korea
1961–62	Senior Bridge Instructor, Engineer Center, Fort Belvoir
1962–63	Sergeant Major, 91st Engineer Battalion, Fort Belvoir
1963–64	Military Technical Advisory Group, Indonesia
1964–67	Sergeant Major, 317th Engineer Battalion, Germany
1967–69	Brigade Sergeant Major, 20th Engineer Brigade, Vietnam
1969–73	Sergeant Major, U.S. Army, Alaska, Fort Richardson, Alaska
1973–75	Sergeant Major of the Army

## Selected Decorations and Awards

Distinguished Service Medal  
 Legion of Merit with two Oak Leaf Clusters  
 Bronze Star Medal with one Oak Leaf Cluster  
 Air Medal  
 Army Commendation Medal with three Oak Leaf Clusters  
 Good Conduct Medal  
 Asiatic-Pacific Theater Campaign Medal  
 American Campaign Medal  
 European-African-Middle Eastern Campaign Medal  
 World War II Victory Medal  
 Army of Occupation Medal  
 National Defense Service Medal  
 Vietnam Service Medal  
 Republic of Vietnam Campaign Medal





# William G. Bainbridge

A native of rural Galesburg, Illinois, William G. Bainbridge was born on 17 April 1925. His family lived on several farms in the area, and he attended the nearby rural district schools. Bainbridge remembers his youth as a time of sparse material goods when everyone in his family had to “pull together.” Despite the need to work on his family farm and to hire out on other farms for extra cash, he enjoyed school and placed a high value on education. Within a matter of weeks of graduating from Williamsfield High School in 1943, the eighteen-year-old found himself inducted into the U.S. Army.

When the United States entered World War II, Congress required that all incoming soldiers be draftees. This step was taken to allow the War Department more flexibility in assigning newly inducted troops. As a result, William Bainbridge could not immediately follow his older brother into the Army. Instead, he had to volunteer for the draft in June 1943. “I don’t have any regrets,” he later said, “because the thing to do was to go into the service, if you could . . . it just didn’t seem right for me not to go.”

After his induction Bainbridge reported to Camp Grant, Illinois, where he received his first uniforms, the usual medical exam and obligatory shots, and a battery of classification tests. He was initially offered a chance to serve in the Navy, but turned it down—“I can always walk farther than I can swim.” He later recalled that his first experiences with the Army were rather confusing because most of the soldiers running Camp Grant had been in the service only a matter of weeks and had little training or experience themselves.

Bainbridge completed basic training at Camp Wallace, Texas, near San Jacinto Beach and the city of Galveston. The future Sergeant Major of the Army remembers the location as having high humidity and mosquitos so large they must have been “crossed with turkeys.” However, the seventeen-week course, which combined basic and advanced training in anti-aircraft artillery, went well for him. “I was in good physical shape,” he said, and “I didn’t have any problem with the classroom work.” Coming off the farm he felt “invincible.” The toughest part of those first weeks was getting used to the hectic schedule.



Bainbridge in flying school at Grand Forks, North Dakota, 1943.

Basic training dictated six-day weeks of twelve-hour days beginning at 0500. The regimen included serious physical training, and 25-mile marches were common, together with the ordinary military subjects. There were long classes on aircraft identification, but the troops practiced dismounted drill only once a week, firing the .30- and .50-caliber water-cooled machine guns and old British Enfield and Springfield M1903 rifles. The M1 semiautomatic rifle, so commonly identified with World War II, was not issued to the men in Bainbridge's group until after basic training. Later in their training at Camp Wallace, the men learned to fire 90-mm. antiaircraft guns. Despite the tough training schedule, at formations, when the

American flag was lowered each evening, everyone was attired in Class A uniforms.

Life in the rapidly expanding wartime Army often had its dreary side. The newly constructed barracks at Camp Wallace and other posts had no wall lockers, just open bars and beams in the squad bays. The trainees were not allowed to have civilian clothes, primarily due to the lack of storage space. Every Saturday there was a footlocker inspection. Food shortages and poor preparation made meals "terrible" according to Bainbridge, with various goat meat dishes sometimes appearing in the mess hall.

The war and the rapid expansion of the Army made it impossible to find enough experienced soldiers to act as drill sergeants. Therefore, most basic training cadre came from the existing active duty force augmented by reserve and National Guard personnel of limited experience. With the exception of topics like the Articles of War, which required instruction by an officer, all training was carried out by noncommissioned officers. Sergeant Simpson, the platoon sergeant, left a permanent impression on young Bainbridge. "He trained us and told us the little things that we should do . . . the things you ought to do right . . . he also took care of us," Bainbridge said. He did not forget those traits. "You have to take care of soldiers," he told an interviewer years later, "and you can't do it by lip service because they will find you out in a heartbeat."

While at Camp Wallace, Bainbridge applied for flight training. "I wanted to be a hot pilot," he later said, "I liked airplanes . . . it seemed a little bit more glamorous." Initially he was sent to Sheppard Field, near Wichita Falls, Texas, for two weeks of orientation. The next stop was the University of North Dakota at Grand Forks. There Bainbridge packed a year of college education into about five months and learned to fly a Piper Cub. Having completed the initial phase

of the air cadet program, he next reported to the flight training center at Santa Ana Army Air Base, California, in February 1944. The trip from North Dakota took six days on a crowded troop train. At Santa Ana there were more tests and orientations to determine what sort of aircraft he was most suited to fly. Shortly after his arrival, however, he was told that there were more flying cadets than there were planes. Anyone with previous ground force training was reassigned.

Bainbridge was promptly transferred to Lowery Field near Denver, Colorado, for gunnery school. There he waited six weeks to go into training. During that time he worked double-shift KP duty every day. In the end Bainbridge was again transferred when the Army determined that it already had enough gunnery students. Although the end of his flight training was a great disappointment, it turned out to be a lucky break; by early 1944 U.S. bomber crews over Europe were suffering heavy losses.

After a two-week layover awaiting orders at Jefferson Barracks, St. Louis, Missouri, Bainbridge was ordered to Camp Atterbury, Indiana. There he found himself assigned to Company A, 423d Infantry, part of the newly organized 106th Infantry Division. The last division organized for service in World War II, the 106th had just come back from maneuvers in Louisiana. Many of its trained troops, however, had been transferred as fillers to other divisions, and the new men coming in had to fill the ensuing vacancies. As a private, first class, Bainbridge was initially assigned as the company radio man. However, the company commander quickly recognized his leadership potential and made him a squad leader with a direct promotion to sergeant.

The 106th Division received its predeployment training at Camp Atterbury. Bainbridge remembered that he and his fellow soldiers tried to familiarize themselves

with the new weapons, such as the 37-mm. antitank gun and the rocket-launching bazooka. With one Browning automatic rifle team, squad tactics were limited. Despite the 25-mile endurance hikes, the division's morale was high, with the infantry weapons demonstration for Under Secretary of War Robert P. Patterson one of the highlights of his time at Atterbury. But more important, Sergeant Bainbridge earned a promotion there as well as the Expert Infantry Badge. Beyond the pride, professionalism, and leadership earning the award demonstrated, the pay raise of five dollars per month meant a lot in those days.

In the early fall of 1944 the 106th Division prepared to depart for Europe. In October the division traveled by troop train to Camp Miles Standish, near Boston, to await embarkation. After a coordination "snafu"—their designated ship was too large to enter Boston harbor—the division again traveled by train to New York. There, after loading throughout the night, the men of the 106th Division found themselves on the huge liner *Queen Elizabeth*. On board they were billeted four and five deep in "staterooms," spending one night above deck and one night below. Again, Bainbridge thought the food was "terrible"—British rations with lots of mutton. The trip was uneventful, however, as the fast liner, sailing independent of the slow convoys, zig-zagged across the Atlantic to lessen the chance of being torpedoed.

After landing in England, the 106th Division spent three weeks at a staging area near Cheltenham. There they were outfitted, honed their skills in the classroom, and did a little sightseeing. The time, however, proved a brief respite as it had become evident that the war in Europe would not be over that year.

In early November 1944 Sergeant Bainbridge and his regiment crossed the English Channel to Le Havre, France, and then moved by foot and truck to the





Bainbridge as a prisoner of war shortly before being liberated from Stalag 9A.

Siegfried Line in the rugged Schnee Eifel sector of Germany, east of St. Vith, Belgium. There they replaced the 2d and 28th Infantry Divisions. Bainbridge remembers the unit being thinly stretched with squads covering 1,500-meter fronts in their supposedly quiet sector. The 423d sent out combat patrols to gather intelligence, but had little idea of what was to come. In early December, however, the Germans secretly completed the buildup for their Ardennes offensive, later known as the Battle of the Bulge. Then on 16 December 1944, "all hell broke loose."

For five days the men of the 423d and other units in the Ardennes delayed the German advance. Everyone, including cooks and clerks, was thrown into the line. But the regiment was unequipped to face concentrations of German armor using the element of surprise. Penetrating gaps in the thinly held line, the Germans overran the division rear, and artillery support immediately slackened. Meanwhile rain, snow, and fog prevented American war planes from supporting the ground forces. On 18 December, powerful

German panzer and infantry units isolated the 422d and 423d Infantry from each other and cut them off from the rest of the division. By then the 423d had suffered over 300 casualties, spent all of its mortar rounds, lost most of its machine guns, and run short of rifle ammunition. The next day German artillery swept the regiment's front, and shortly afterward enemy infantry coursed over the American positions. With the 423d cut off, tactical control and supporting fire gone, increasing numbers of wounded, and rifle ammunition down to just five rounds per man, the regiment surrendered on 19 December.<sup>1</sup> "We traded our lives and space for time," Bainbridge later said of their action in the snow. The 106th's stiff resistance was a major factor in upsetting the German timetable for reaching the Meuse and cutting off the Allied armies from their vital logistical lifelines at Antwerp.

The Germans searched the captured Americans of the 423d and immediately segregated the officers, NCOs, and privates. Alternating sets of guards then marched them to a railhead. Bainbridge and the other POWs spent the next five nights and four days packed into freight cars with straw-covered floors, with neither food nor toilets. Water was available only once to the prisoners when Allied war planes caused a delay and other POWs forced to work on the railroad gave them some. Bainbridge and his fellow soldiers were finally unloaded at Stalag 9B, Bad Orb, east of Frankfurt. Three weeks later the NCOs were taken to Stalag 9A at Ziegenhain near Giessen.

1. The predicament of the 423d which SMA Bainbridge described is amplified by Hugh M. Cole's study, *The Ardennes: Battle of the Bulge*, part of the United States Army in World War II series, first published by the Center of Military History in 1965. Information from that study (pp. 165–66) has been used here to enhance the points Bainbridge made in his interview of March 1994.

Prisoner-of-war camp conditions were intolerable. More than 3,000 Allied soldiers filled the camp, with 250 men stuffed in each barrack. Despite the often subfreezing temperatures, outside latrines were necessary supplements to the single one inside. Since baths and mandatory delousing came but every six weeks, the men, their bedding, and clothes were infested with vermin. Rations consisted of two-thirds of a canteen cup of vegetable soup each day with a slice of black bread on Sunday. Sometimes the Germans included a little horse meat. Sergeant Bainbridge later recalled, "my love of country, the way I was brought up, and my family life helped sustain me."

The American 6th Armored Division liberated Stalag 9A on Good Friday in 1945 and provided needed medical attention and decent food. The repatriated GIs at first received soup and bread, a loaf and a half at a time. After ten days of rebuilding their strength, Bainbridge and his fellow soldiers flew to Camp Lucky Strike, near Le Havre. There they received an additional two weeks of medical care and as much food as they cared to eat. Finally, they convoyed home by ship. The return crossing took two weeks with hundreds of former POWs and rotating air crew members on board.

The war concluded shortly after Sergeant Bainbridge's return to the United States. After three days at Camp Kilmer, New Jersey, he went to Fort Sheridan, Illinois, where he was given sixty days of leave. Like many others, he immediately returned to his hometown for a reunion with family, friends, and other veterans. On 20 June 1945, he married Hazel Smith of Momence, Illinois, a girl whom he had known since grade school.

At the conclusion of his leave, Bainbridge reported to Miami Beach, Florida. There he shared a hotel with nearly 700 other soldiers and dependents all awaiting reassign-

ment. Transferred to Camp Maxie, near Paris, Texas, he was soon joined by his new wife in an upstairs room and bath, while working as an armorer at an infantry replacement training base. Hazel Bainbridge returned home to Illinois when her husband again transferred to Camp Roberts, California. There, on 7 December 1945, Bainbridge received his discharge and returned to civilian life in Galesburg, Illinois.

When fighting broke out in Korea in 1950 William Bainbridge had been a farmer in Victoria, Illinois, for several years. During that time he had joined the Army Reserve, and in October 1950 he was recalled to active duty. Granted a delay to harvest the crops and settle his personal affairs, he finally reported for duty in January 1951.

Recalled as a staff sergeant, Bainbridge in-processed at Fort Sheridan and was told that he would be sent to Camp Breckenridge, Kentucky. He instead ended up at Camp Atterbury, where he had been with the 106th Infantry Division during the last war. There he served as platoon sergeant, then first sergeant (as a sergeant, first class, E-6) of the 5012th Army Service Unit, a joint Army-Air Force food service school.<sup>2</sup> After a year the Army consolidated that and other Army school elements at Fort Sheridan, where Sergeant First Class Bainbridge became the personnel NCO. A year later a second consolidation transferred Bainbridge to Fort Riley, Kansas. As the period of his recall was about to expire, Bainbridge requested enlistment in the Regular Army with the intention of becoming a career soldier. After a grade determination, he reenlisted as a sergeant, first class.

In February 1958 Sergeant First Class Bainbridge departed for Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri, to become the operations

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2. Prior to the creation of pay grades E-8 and E-9, the ranks of staff sergeant, sergeant, first class, platoon sergeant, and first sergeant were one grade lower than they are today.

sergeant of the 3d Battalion, 4th Training Regiment, which then included the Fifth Army food service school. His eleven-month tour there resulted in his first decoration, the Army Commendation Medal. Bainbridge was then assigned to VII Corps in Stuttgart, Germany, in January 1959. His family, which now included two daughters, had been living in house trailers for nearly a decade. In Germany conditions were little better. After traveling to Europe by ship, the Bainbridge family found itself separated due to the lack of family quarters. Hazel and the children lived in Warner Kaserne near Munich, nearly three and a half hours by automobile from Stuttgart. "They had been maid's quarters," Bainbridge remembered, "the worst quarters we ever had."

At the time, the VII Corps included two cavalry regiments, three infantry divisions, and two armored divisions. At the corps headquarters Bainbridge served successively as operations sergeant, G-3 air sergeant, and secret document control NCO for the corps G-3.

Reassigned to Fort Riley in August 1962, Bainbridge found himself returning to Europe four months later. The construction of the Berlin Wall caused that unexpected turn of events. The military and diplomatic crisis that followed led to a partial mobilization, and Bainbridge found himself the acting sergeant major of the 1st Battle Group, 28th Infantry, on its initial deployment to Operation LONG THRUST.<sup>3</sup> In February 1963 he received his permanent promotion to the newly established grade of E-9. The 1st Battle Group was later reorganized into the 1st and 2d Battalions of the 28th Infantry as part of the Reorganization of Army Divisions (ROAD) program.

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3. Operation LONG THRUST was a tactical deployment of troops from the continental United States to Europe during what has come to be known as the Berlin Crisis.

In August 1965, three years after his first assignment to the 1st Battalion, 28th Infantry, Sergeant Major Bainbridge deployed with the 1st Infantry Division to Vietnam. During the movement of the division Bainbridge served as sergeant major of the troopship carrying a portion of the men and their equipment into combat. Serving in the Big Red One first in War Zone C at Phuoc Vinh, north of Saigon, he was later selected by Maj. Gen. Jonathan O. Seaman, commander of the newly created II Field Force at Long Binh, as his sergeant major. The II Field Force, a corps-level organization, included the 1st and 25th Infantry Divisions, a brigade of the 101st Airborne Division, and the 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment. General Seaman, who had previously commanded the 1st Infantry Division when it was deployed to Vietnam, had obviously been impressed with Bainbridge's performance.

In Vietnam Sergeant Major Bainbridge had quickly earned a reputation for always accompanying his men on their field operations. At first, he saw improvements resulting from the training changes made since World War II. Later, however, he believed the situation had changed for the worse, especially when replacements came to Vietnam. The one-year tours of duty for soldiers caused a continual turnover of personnel. Also, NCOs were lost due to battle casualties, the one-year tours, and the lack of any mobilization to tap the senior enlisted men in the reserve components. His experience led him to become a strong supporter of the Noncommissioned Officer Candidate program established to help solve those problems.

In September 1966 Bainbridge became sergeant major of the Infantry Training Center at Fort Benning, Georgia. He remained there until August 1967, when he was reassigned to First Army headquarters at Fort George G. Meade, Maryland. Bainbridge began to identify and solve soldier problems at both posts.



At Fort Benning he drastically reduced the assignment of trainees to post details and reduced harassment. At First Army, Bainbridge believed, his greatest accomplishment was bringing the NCOs together to work as a cohesive group. He also worked on solving the chronic problem of finding adequate quarters for NCOs.

Bainbridge became sergeant major of United States Army, Pacific (USARPAC), at Fort Shafter, Hawaii, in January 1969. After the designee for that post, Sgt. Maj. Joseph Venable, died in a helicopter crash in Vietnam, Bainbridge accepted the challenge. There he served as a "voice of the soldiers," establishing a good working relationship with General Ralph E. Haines, Jr., USARPAC commander. Bainbridge traveled with General Haines on numerous trips to U.S. and allied bases around the Pacific rim and coordinated the first command-wide sergeants major meeting, bringing in senior noncommissioned officers from major Army headquarters in USARPAC and on a rotating basis from Thailand, Australia, New Zealand, Korea, and Indonesia. At the same time, he continued to work closely with senior NCOs of the U.S. Army, Vietnam, and Military Assistance Command, Vietnam, as well as the senior enlisted personnel at Pacific Air Force, Pacific Fleet, Marine units, Coast Guard stations, and CINCPAC headquarters in Hawaii. Bainbridge left USARPAC in October 1972.

In February 1968 the Command Sergeants Major Board had selected Bainbridge to be one of the first command sergeants major in the Army. That elite group included Sergeant Major of the Army Wooldridge and three other future Sergeants Major of the Army—George Dunaway, Silas Copeland, and Leon Van Autreve. It came as no great surprise when Col. Karl Morton, the first commandant of the newly established Sergeants Major Academy at Fort Bliss,



Command Sergeant Major Bainbridge is initiated into the Pleiku Elephant Riding Society in Phu Nhon District, Vietnam, 1969.

Texas, selected Bainbridge as the academy's command sergeant major.

The education and training of noncommissioned officers had gradually improved since World War II, but the Army needed a senior NCO school as a capstone for the Noncommissioned Officer Education System which had evolved since the late 1950s. Having seen the benefits of enhanced NCO professional development while at the same time being unable to attend an NCO academy himself because of critical duties, Sergeant Major Bainbridge was particularly pleased to be part of the first staff and faculty of the

new Sergeants Major Academy, now a formal senior enlisted service school.

The three years that Sergeant Major Bainbridge and his wife spent at Fort Bliss were rewarding, if somewhat disruptive at first. Once again, they had to contend with a shortage of family quarters (a consistent worry for NCOs that Bainbridge would later make a priority while Sergeant Major of the Army), together with borrowed offices and other unfinished facilities. Nevertheless, Mrs. Bainbridge continued the involvement in community affairs which had marked her previous tours with her husband, and Bainbridge himself later credited the work of his wife as the foundation of much of his success. In fact, his sense of history, both institutional and personal, was always a part of his life and career. Twenty years later, Bainbridge asserted that "World War II was won in the [prewar] classrooms at the Army War College and the Command and General Staff College," adding that "the conflict in the [Persian] Gulf was won by the NCO Education System." The academy, he felt, was the capstone of that system.

In July 1975 the Army Chief of Staff, General Frederick C. Weyand, selected Sergeant Major Bainbridge to serve as his Sergeant Major of the Army. The president of the selection board was Lt. Gen. John Forrest, with Maj. Gens. James Hamlet, John W. McEnery, and David E. Ott, and outgoing Sergeant Major of the Army Van Autreve serving as members. Bainbridge later remembered the board as one of the two best he had ever faced, the other being the board that chose the previous Sergeant Major of the Army in 1973. "There were fair questions," he said. "There were no trick questions at all. It just was a good board."

In outlining the duties of the office, General Weyand asked him to look for "things you think soldiers need, that they're not getting. Let us know if we can help from

this office." In practice Bainbridge found the new job comfortable and the "formidable" Pentagon generals supportive. Bainbridge had few problems adapting to his new surroundings. "I couldn't travel anywhere or go into any office," he later said, "without running into someone who had been through that academy, or who had served with me at USARPAC or at First Army. So it was sort of like 'old home week,' really."

Bainbridge already knew many on the Army staff from previous assignments. It was therefore easy to work with General Weyand and the various action officers on his staff. "I took issues to the Chief of Staff or the Vice Chief of Staff only if absolutely necessary," he said. "I always found that it was much easier to work with the staff, who used their natural expertise and their desire to get things done in their own bailiwicks, rather than have it come from the Chief as a directive."

From time to time Sergeant Major Bainbridge had to venture into new areas. For example, he began to accompany the Chief of Staff to congressional hearings, even testifying himself. Regarding such topics as commissary operations, troop strength, housing problems, pay, and personnel policies, not to mention soldier morale, congressmen put special value on the words of the Army's senior enlisted soldier.

Sergeant Major of the Army Bainbridge also traveled extensively during his tour of duty. He made it a point to visit troops in Europe, Korea, and the Far East each year. He also tried to visit as many big stateside installations as possible, often hitting reserve and National Guard units in conjunction with such travels. He later admitted seeing everyone was impossible and his itinerary had to be guided by necessity and events. Although many of his visits were at the request of the host installation, he insisted that his travel would be troop-oriented.

His visit to Johnston Island was typical. The Army troops on that Pacific isle served isolated tours, away from their families and without many of the amenities of normal posts. Their “theater,” for example, was merely an open area where a screen and projector could be erected at night when the weather cooperated. In this case Sergeant Major Bainbridge convinced the Army and Air Force Exchange System (AAFES) to bring good entertainment to a hardship duty station at no cost. The prestige of his office was such that he could call the AAFES commander directly and request that he give attention to the situation on Johnston Island.

Sergeant Major Bainbridge followed the example of his predecessors and had his wife accompany him when he made official visits. The additional information she gathered and the reassurance her presence gave soldiers’ families were so valuable that the practice has been followed by successive Sergeants Major of the Army. Its impact was not lost on the Chiefs of Staff. During the tenure of Sergeant Major of the Army Dunaway, General Abrams made it a matter of policy that the Sergeant Major of the Army should be married. Remembering his own experiences, Sergeant Major Bainbridge was convinced that Army leaders “have to take care of the family. If you don’t, you’re going to lose a soldier.”

As the others before him, Sergeant Major Bainbridge received dozens of complaints each week from enlisted soldiers. Although believing that 90 percent of those written complaints could have been handled through command channels, he attempted to resolve every one of them. In many cases, he believed, the soldiers involved simply wanted advice and the personal touch. He took his role as “the voice of the soldier” in the Office of the Army Chief of Staff very seriously.

Bainbridge served as Sergeant Major of the Army for four years, formally ending the

two-year tradition. General Bernard W. Rogers, who replaced Weyand as Chief of Staff in October 1976, had asked Bainbridge to remain in office to push through his initiatives. Although the Sergeant Major was glad to have the opportunity to work with an officer whose confidence he enjoyed, he personally was reluctant to break the tradition of serving for a short period with one Chief of Staff and thought it important to keep the established selection process intact. He agreed with Sergeant Major of the Army Dunaway that keeping a fresh flow of ideas from recent troop experience was critical.<sup>4</sup> General Rogers, however, convinced Bainbridge to continue serving as SMA for the duration of his own term as Army Chief of Staff.

Among the accomplishments of his term as Sergeant Major of the Army, Bainbridge felt proudest of securing permanent funding for the Noncommissioned Officer Education System. Next he valued his work on the Army Policy Council, to which General Weyand appointed him. In keeping with his feeling that the duties of the Office of Sergeant Major of the Army were best carried out by working with the appropriate action and staff officers, Bainbridge was instrumental in having senior NCOs placed on the general staff to which he himself was appointed by General Rogers. He served on the Army Uniform Board during his entire tenure in office and designed the insignia of rank for the Sergeant Major of the Army that was used until October 1994: three overhead stripes, three lower rockers, and two stars in between.

Bainbridge believed that the Office of Sergeant Major of the Army changed with each incumbent and each Chief of Staff. He enjoyed “having the entire Army to explore.” Although he was not a policy-maker, he influenced several key decisions affecting the

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4. Interv, SGM (Ret.) Erwin H. Koehler with SMA (Ret.) George W. Dunaway, Dec 93.





SMA Bainbridge talks with a soldier during Exercise REFORGER 1979.

Army of the future. "What was good enough yesterday," he said, "certainly is not going to be good enough tomorrow." A strong believer that command sergeants major, indeed all senior NCOs, are teachers, Sergeant Major Bainbridge judged as vital their role in passing on information to the new soldiers entering the Army.

Despite all his accomplishments, Bainbridge left office recognizing that there were many unresolved issues. He regretted the amount of time it often took to get things done and was especially frustrated by selected noncommissioned officers who declined attendance at the Sergeants Major Academy.

The retirement ceremony for Sergeant Major of the Army Bainbridge took place at

Fort Myer on 18 June 1979. It was quite a thrill for him to review the Old Guard with the Chief of Staff and the Secretary of the Army while his family looked on. It was there that he received the Distinguished Service Medal for his service. As Sergeant Major of the Army, Bainbridge had met both Presidents Gerald Ford and Jimmy Carter. Speaking of his retirement ceremony, however, Sergeant Major Bainbridge said, "It can't get much better than that."

In a sense, Bainbridge served beyond his retirement. For many years he had been active in the Association of the United States Army and the Noncommissioned Officers Association. That work continued. In addition, he served as secretary to the Board of Commissioners of the Soldiers' and Airmen's Home in Washington, D.C., for three years and served for nine years as its first director of member services.

The new Chief of Staff, General Edward C. Meyer, honored Sergeant Major Bainbridge after his retirement by presenting him with the Army General Staff Identification Badge, only recently authorized for NCOs. It recognized that he "was the one individual most responsible for the assignment and recognition of Senior Staff Noncommissioned Officers to positions of responsibility as action officers on the Army General Staff and to the Army Secretariat." "He worked continuously," SMA William A. Connelly later stated, "to expand the role of the Senior Noncommissioned Officer within the Headquarters, Department of the Army."<sup>5</sup> As Bainbridge once said, "You've got to trust your noncommissioned officers, because that's what they're there for." He devoted his career to that ideal.

5. Memo, SMA William A. Connelly for the Director of the Army Staff, 13 Dec 79. Author's files, CMH.

## Assignments

1943	Inducted into service, Camp Grant, Illinois, and Basic Training, Camp Wallace, Texas
1943–44	Air Cadet, U.S. Army Air Forces, University of North Dakota and Santa Ana, California
1944–45	Squad Leader, Company A, 423d Infantry, 106th Division, Europe (break in service, 1946–50)
1951–58	Platoon Sergeant, Personnel NCO, First Sergeant, 5012th Army Service Unit, Fort Sheridan, Illinois; Camp Atterbury, Indiana; Fort Riley, Kansas
1958–59	Operations Sergeant, 3d Battalion, 4th Training Regiment, Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri
1959–62	Operations Sergeant, G–3 Air Sergeant, Secret Document Control NCO, Headquarters, VII Corps, Stuttgart, Germany
1962–65	Sergeant Major, 1st Battle Group, 28th Infantry, 1st Infantry Division, Fort Riley, Kansas
1965–66	Sergeant Major, 1st Battalion, 28th Infantry; Sergeant Major, II Field Force, Republic of Vietnam
1966–67	Sergeant Major, Infantry Training Center, Fort Benning, Georgia
1967–68	Sergeant Major, First United States Army, Fort George G. Meade, Maryland
1969–72	Sergeant Major, United States Army, Pacific, Fort Shafter, Hawaii
1972–75	Sergeant Major, Sergeants Major Academy, Fort Bliss, Texas
1975–79	Sergeant Major of the Army

## Selected Decorations and Awards

Distinguished Service Medal  
 Legion of Merit with two Oak Leaf Clusters  
 Bronze Star Medal  
 Purple Heart with one Oak Leaf Cluster  
 Air Medal  
 Army Commendation Medal with three Oak Leaf Clusters  
 Good Conduct Medal  
 American Campaign Medal  
 European–North African–Middle Eastern Campaign Medal  
 World War II Victory Medal  
 National Defense Service Medal  
 Army of Occupation Medal  
 Armed Forces Expeditionary Medal  
 Vietnam Service Medal  
 Prisoner of War Medal  
 Republic of Vietnam Campaign Medal  
 Combat Infantryman Badge





# William A. Connelly

**W**illiam A. Connelly was born on 2 June 1931 in Monticello, Georgia, and lived in a small town or rural setting until he graduated from high school. During the summers he worked in the local peach-packing plants and later in a dairy. Upon graduation, he attended Georgia Southwestern College, driving a school bus in Americus, Georgia, to pay his tuition. He intended to major in agriculture and work in soil conservation, but the lure of \$33.00 every three months in the Georgia National Guard led him to enlist in 1949. His pay more than covered his annual college tuition of \$37.50. He became a private in Company C, 190th Tank Battalion, stationed in Americus. After his first summer at Camp Stewart, he was promoted to private, first class, and before finishing college had progressed through the ranks to sergeant.

Weekly National Guard drill sessions lasted for only a couple of hours, and soldiers forgot what they had learned from one meeting to the next. Some of the NCOs and officers, although combat veterans of World War II, had served in the Army Air Corps or in the SeaBees (Navy Construction Battalions) during the war and knew little

about tanks or peacetime soldiering. However, the unit benefited from the camaraderie of a group of lifetime friends and neighbors. NCOs and soldiers downplayed rank and deference to superiors. The soldier in charge of a project or detail was the one who knew best how to get it done, regardless of rank. Sergeant Connelly's time in the National Guard made its imprint on him. He left the 190th with a love for tanks and an understanding of the difficulty of training a National Guard unit for war. Both impressions impacted on decisions he would make later in his career.

After finishing two years at college, Connelly landed a job in Macon and continued his education. He had to drive seventy miles to attend National Guard meetings, and when he missed some of them his commander told him he might be drafted. Instead, Connelly and several friends decided to join the Marine Corps. The Marine recruiter accepted them, but their company commander declared them essential to the National Guard. In the end, Connelly volunteered to be drafted into the Army. Unaware of the law that allowed him to go into the Regular

Army retaining his previous rank, he became a "slick-sleeve" private all over again. However, after a personnel officer had screened his records, Connelly was quickly promoted to sergeant, first class (E-6).

In March 1954, Sergeant First Class Connelly formally entered the active Army at Fort Jackson, South Carolina, where he went through basic training with recruits destined for the 82d Airborne Division. Eight weeks later, he moved to Fort Knox, Kentucky, for Advanced Individual Training (AIT) with the 761st Tank Battalion. Due to his previous experience and rank, he soon became a tank commander and "Trainee of the Cycle." Being older and senior in rank presented both problems and benefits. He was somewhat out of shape compared with the younger soldiers and despite his rank felt that he did not know what he thought an NCO should know. Age gave him the maturity to see his own shortcomings. He sat down with the instructors at night to talk over what he knew and what he still needed to learn. He developed the habit of assessing the training techniques of the instructors, using the ones he found effective later in his own career. The exposure to soldiers from different parts of the country and from different ethnic groups broadened the perspective of this country boy from a small southern town.

During his training, Sergeant First Class Connelly took the Officer Candidate Test and scored high enough for the examining corporal to ask him if he wanted to attend Officer Candidate School. Connelly replied, "Hell, no. I want to serve my two years and get out of here." He soon changed his mind, however. He later earned a reserve commission and served over thirty years as an enlisted man in the Regular Army.

After AIT, Connelly became a tank commander in Company B, 761st Tank Battalion, on a permanent basis. The battalion, assigned to the 3d Armored Division, had two missions—supporting the Armor

School and training for its wartime roles. At the time, AIT students normally trained as part of "packet platoons" and later deployed overseas as a unit, maintaining the cohesion developed during AIT. After the first eight-week cycle, Connelly progressed to platoon sergeant and later to company first sergeant, all in the same company in which he had received his training.

He received the assignment as first sergeant by volunteering when the incumbent received orders for Europe. Sergeant First Class Connelly was only twenty-three and had "the least experience of anybody there." But because no one else volunteered and he felt sorry for the lieutenant, Connelly told him, "Well, if nobody else will take the job, I'll take it." Fortunately, the battalion sergeant major took him under his wing and taught him the first sergeant's administrative duties—suspense files, morning reports, AWOL/absentee baggage, and so forth. When a master sergeant reported into the unit, Connelly became the "field first," the NCO who led the company in the field while the assigned first sergeant handled administrative duties in garrison. Later, as the Army grew more complex, an administrative warrant officer appeared in each tank company to free the first sergeant for his more traditional duties with soldiers.

The pace of promotions became glacial after the Korean War. "It seemed like, for several years, someone had to die or retire to create a vacancy." Even NCOs who had been promoted during the war had to worry about keeping their rank. These were the days of the "blood stripe." Since promotions were more decentralized than they are today, an NCO who got another in trouble could often get his stripe. Recognizing the effect such stagnation of promotions had on morale, the Army eventually created the NCO "supergrades," E-8 (master sergeant or first sergeant) and E-9 (sergeant major) in 1958.



SFC Connelly (right) relaxes with fellow NCOs at the Seventh Army NCO Academy.

Life for soldiers with families could be difficult. Quarters were available only for senior NCOs and officers, and real estate agents took advantage of soldiers looking for housing downtown. Low pay made it difficult to own a car to commute to work, so many carpooled. "Sergeants, first class, staff sergeants, and master sergeants had the same hard time that privates, first class, and specialists have today."

In January 1955 Connelly, still a sergeant, first class, received orders for his first overseas tour of duty and a chance to soldier in a tank unit with a wartime mission. The 826th Tank Battalion was in Hammelburg, Germany, the site of General George S. Patton's abortive raid to free American prisoners of war in 1945. The

826th was part of the 19th Armored Group, a combined arms unit with armored infantry and artillery in addition to tank battalions. Connelly became a tank commander and attended a tank commanders' course on gunnery, maintenance, and tactics at Vilseck. Despite his relative lack of experience in armor, after the course Connelly "knew that tank as well as any of my crew members and as well as any other tank commander." Unlike those at Fort Knox, the tankers in Germany had the opportunity to fire all of the gunnery tables and, before Germany negotiated the Status of Forces Agreement, could freely maneuver over the countryside. Ever since that assignment, Connelly preferred duty overseas, which was geared toward a real wartime mission, to that at state-





Connelly on duty in the Dominican Republic, 1965.

side posts. During his tour, he again became a platoon sergeant.

Not long after his arrival in Germany, Hammelburg returned to German control, and the 826th moved to Schweinfurt. A year later, it rotated to Fort Benning, Georgia, as part of Operation GYROSCOPE, exchanging equipment with the 714th Tank Battalion. By moving as a unit, the 826th retained its cohesion and teamwork. At Fort Benning, Georgia, Sergeant First Class Connelly served as a platoon sergeant and later as a battalion operations sergeant until 1958.

Connelly had been in the United States only two years when he returned to Germany. This time, he went to Fuerth, assigned as a platoon sergeant in the 2d Battalion, 67th Armor. The battalion was equipped with the heavy M103 tank, armed with a 105-mm.

gun. The shortage of officers meant that he was a platoon sergeant for a platoon leader who was also a sergeant, first class. Although the platoon leader was "a good guy," Connelly was the only NCO drawing proficiency pay. He told his company commander, "If there is going to be a platoon leader in this outfit, it's probably going to be me." Having two NCOs of the same grade in the same platoon appeared a bad idea. To solve the problem, the captain transferred Connelly to another company, where he served as a platoon sergeant with no officer. While in Fuerth, he was promoted to the pay grade of E-7. He served in the 67th Armor until 1961.

Once back in the United States, Connelly was assigned to the 3d Medium Tank Battalion, 32d Armor, 24th Infantry Division, at Fort Stewart, Georgia. His state-side respite lasted all of thirty days. In 1961, the Berlin crisis erupted as the Soviets threatened to unilaterally disrupt the status quo in the former German capital and allowed the Communist East German government to build the infamous Berlin Wall to prevent East Germans from escaping to freedom in the West. The 24th Division reinforced U.S. forces in Germany, with the 3d Battalion assigned to Augsburg. Shortly thereafter the battalion was issued the new M60 tank. Sergeant Connelly had "never seen the morale of a unit increase as much as when we got seventeen brand-new M60 tanks. It was like every soldier had a brand-new Cadillac." The M60 was diesel powered, making it less likely to catch fire if hit; carried a more potent 105-mm. gun; was more mobile; and best of all, was almost impossible to fuel with five-gallon fuel cans, which relieved tankers of one of their more onerous tasks.<sup>1</sup> The sense of pride in the new tanks added to Connelly's great satisfaction in

1. The fuel inlet was so far recessed in the engine decking that tank crewmen required a long nozzle or funnel to reach it.

serving with several excellent NCOs and officers. Two of his company commanders later became general officers.

In those days before extensive involvement in Vietnam, the Army was stable and units in Europe could spend a great deal of time on training. Experienced officers and NCOs continually taught classes on tank gunnery and tactics, as well as everything from map reading to first aid. The crisis in Berlin and the proximity of Warsaw Pact forces added a sense of urgency to such efforts. During this tour, Sergeant First Class Connelly was promoted and assigned as the battalion operations sergeant and later company first sergeant. After the promotion, Col. Norman Stanfield, the commander, informed Connelly of his next position in no uncertain terms: "Look, I've listened to the reasons why you didn't want to be ops sergeant. Now, you can go out and get drunk, but when you come back Monday morning, you are going to be the battalion operations sergeant." Acquiescing to the commander's wishes, Connelly "spent a good time as ops sergeant and never regretted it." In 1964 First Sergeant Connelly was reassigned to Fort Stewart, this time to the 4th Battalion, 68th Armor, 2d Infantry Division.

At Stewart, Connelly began what he thought would be a three-year tour in the United States after he had spent so much of his career overseas. That was not to be. Unrest in the Dominican Republic led to the deployment of U.S. forces to protect American lives and stabilize the country. After the lightly armed contingents of the XVIII Airborne Corps arrived under the auspices of the Organization of American States, the need for armor quickly became apparent. A hand-picked company from the 68th Armor was selected to deploy as a show of force. As the headquarters company first sergeant, Connelly had been trying to move into a line company. He got his chance when

the other first sergeants turned out to be non-deployable and he was selected to go with the deploying company. The company embarked on a landing ship, tank (LST), and departed without knowing its destination. Upon arrival in the Dominican Republic, it disembarked, met elements of the 82d Airborne Division, and set up a perimeter. After a week, the company was directed to send platoons through the streets of the capital to run rebel forces out. The tankers operated under strict rules of engagement. They could return fire with their .45-caliber pistols if fired upon, but needed clearance from the company commander to fire their carbines. The XVIII Airborne Corps commander, Lt. Gen. Bruce Palmer, Jr., had to approve the firing of the coaxial .30-caliber machine gun. To fire the .50-caliber machine gun, the tankers had to get approval from the theater commander, a Brazilian general. To fire the 90-mm. main gun, they needed Pentagon approval. Fortunately, the company never got into a firefight. It would respond as a show of force wherever fighting broke out—the arrival of tanks on the scene was enough to stop the fighting immediately.

The deadliest enemy was boredom. The company leaders kept the men occupied without allowing them to leave the perimeter by holding area beautification contests and taking organized trips to the beach to swim. Their task was made easier by the fact that the unit was composed of the best 110 soldiers from an already tight-knit battalion. The company remained in the Dominican Republic for ten months until elections were held and the situation stabilized. Thirty days after the company arrived back at Fort Stewart, it redeployed to Fort Knox and became part of the 66th Armor with a mission of supporting the Armor School.

In December 1966, Master Sergeant Connelly was reassigned to the Georgia National Guard as an adviser. He went to a



Connelly as first sergeant of Troop B, 1/9th Cavalry, in Vietnam, 1969.

tank battalion in Macon, but moved on to Griffin with the 196th Cavalry Squadron, serving as senior adviser with no officers assigned over him. The squadron was spread out across Georgia, and many of its personnel drilled on weekdays rather than on weekends. This required a great deal of flexibility on Connelly's part. The squadron NCOs held the organization together despite frequent changes and redesignations. "They were a cav squadron one year, then an engineer unit the next year, the next year a straight tank battalion, the next year armored infantry."

Most guardsmen joined the unit partly to supplement their income, but some enlisted to avoid the draft as the war in Vietnam escalated. Connelly recalls, "We had a waiting list to join . . . and I don't remember how many times I was offered bribes. Influential people would call me up about getting people into the unit." Personnel turnover, the lack of combat experience, the lack of officer education programs, and the limited 38-day training year made it almost impossible for the squadron to adequately prepare for war. "Every summer camp that I went to was like starting all over again." Although Connelly felt frustrated by having to put the best face on the dismal level of training achieved, he considered the assignment rewarding because he worked with dedicated NCOs who had a "lifetime invested in their unit."

The war that many in the 196th Cavalry Squadron had avoided by joining the National Guard ended Connelly's assignment with the unit. In October 1969 he received orders for Troop B, 1st Squadron, 9th Cavalry, 1st Cavalry Division, stationed in Quan Loi, Republic of Vietnam. There he would continue his long line of tours as a troop first sergeant, serving in that capacity for the entire one-year tour. Troop B, an air cavalry unit, flew almost continuous combat missions and became one of the most highly decorated units in Vietnam. Connelly's troop had over 600 soldiers and 54 warrant officers (pilots and copilots), but only a few NCOs had previous combat experience in Vietnam and only one from Korea. Many of the squad leaders were privates, first class, who had been made "instant NCOs."

During one operation, a rifle platoon rappelled from helicopters into a landing zone under enemy fire. All the platoon's leaders were either injured or hit by enemy fire in the first few minutes, and the unit had to be extracted almost immediately. A specialist, fourth class, was the only experienced soldier



available to direct the effort. First Sergeant Connelly and the troop commander flew overhead, observing, until the commander told Connelly to go down and “get those guys out.” Once inside the landing zone, Connelly recalls, “There were all kinds of fire and noise and everything, but all I did was calm down this young specialist four” who actually handled the extraction. At Connelly’s insistence, the young soldier was awarded a Silver Star for his initiative and bravery.

Tanker Connelly’s experience had not prepared him for the kind of combat in Vietnam or for the lack of discipline among the troops. By late 1969, drug use and racial strife were becoming major problems. Junior NCOs often lacked the training, experience, and maturity to deal with the many situations that arose. Connelly thought himself among the least combat-experienced NCOs, but those with more such experience were often in “soft” jobs, “in Bihn Hoa, or in a club, or in the United States. Anybody that had any influence whatsoever didn’t go to Troop B, 1st Squadron, 9th Cavalry. I probably wouldn’t have had to go, if I didn’t want to, but I was just a guy that did what the hell I was told to do.”

Despite his feelings about his own lack of experience, Connelly applied imaginative solutions to the drug problems. He searched tents for drugs without worrying excessively about “probable cause.” As he put it, “I didn’t know what probable cause was, except that I was probably going to get killed over here if I didn’t get these soldiers off drugs.”

Besides drug abuse, the frequent change of commanders prevented an accumulation of combat experience in a unit. To maximize combat command experience throughout the officer corps, the Army rotated officers into six-month command tours. The short command tours resulted in a rollercoaster effect in learning the lessons of combat. Connelly later stressed, “The biggest

problem that a soldier, his platoon leader, platoon sergeant, and first sergeant have got is to change company commanders. We can live with that in peacetime, but you can’t do that during war.” With only six months to learn the job and make their mark, commanders tended to focus on avoiding mistakes and oversupervised operations. This undercut the authority of subordinate leaders. Fortunately for Troop B, First Sergeant Connelly spent his entire one-year tour with the unit, which benefited from his no-nonsense style of leadership.

In November 1970 Connelly left Vietnam for a tour as first sergeant of the Reception Company, 1st Training Brigade, at Fort Knox. Although he preferred an armor assignment, he later admitted that the experience of seeing young men become soldiers gave him valuable insights into a part of the Army he had only seen as a young draftee. Later, as Sergeant Major of the Army, he used some of the lessons he had learned there to improve the process and to adapt it for the all-volunteer Army.

After over ten years of first sergeant duty, Connelly was promoted and became sergeant major of both the 1st and 2d Battalions of the 1st Training Brigade. The advancement occurred at a time when he felt that he was stagnating in his career and that NCOs who had once worked for him were passing him by. He recalls, “I had been a first sergeant so long that my daughter called me ‘Top,’ because she thought that was my nickname. I never got discouraged. I was a good first sergeant, and I loved what I was doing. I used to tell my wife, ‘Oh well, the Army will recognize my talents one of these days, and I’ll move right along.’” In the next six years, Connelly “moved right along” farther than he had ever thought possible.

In June 1973, Sergeant Major Connelly was selected to attend the Sergeants Major Academy at Fort Bliss,

Texas. At the time he was promoted to sergeant major, he was also on the command sergeants major list. In the early days of the Sergeants Major Academy, many sergeants major saw no need to attend. Connelly's brigade commander, who wanted to keep him in the brigade, offered to help him avoid attending, but the sergeant major replied, "Colonel, you know, I've been going all over Fort Knox here, talking about the NCOES and the Sergeants Major Academy. I'm one of the guys on the study group at Fort Knox to study the NCO Education System and I sign up for it on the ground floor."

Connelly did well at the academy. There he met Glen Morrell, who would later succeed him as Sergeant Major of the Army. He graduated from the Sergeants Major Academy in December 1973, about the same time he was commissioned a captain of Armor in the reserves. Then, for the fourth time in his career, he received orders for duty in Germany.

A confident academy graduate, Command Sergeant Major Connelly had orders assigning him to the 1st Battalion, 35th Armor, 1st Infantry Division, in Erlangen. Upon arrival, he met his sponsor, the acting battalion sergeant major, who was on the promotion list for sergeant major. Connelly reported to the battalion commander, Lt. Col. Frederick B. Hull, who told him that since he had an acting sergeant major, he didn't need him. Connelly told him "very, very politely" that the Department of the Army, not the battalion commander, had assigned him there and that the commander would have to have the orders changed if he did not want him as his sergeant major. After the commander checked with brigade headquarters, he announced that Connelly was indeed to be the battalion sergeant major. To his credit, he told Connelly that their rocky start would not affect their working relationship.

Connelly's stand and later performance as battalion sergeant major impressed the brigade commander, Col. Thomas P. Lynch. When he was promoted to general and took command of the Seventh Army Training Command in 1975, Lynch took Connelly with him to be his sergeant major.

The Training Command at Grafenwoehr included the Hohenfels and Wildflecken Training Areas as well as several outlying communities. Sergeant Major Connelly was the commander's eyes and ears for community matters, a task which took up most of his time. He traveled to the training areas and communities, coordinating with the local sergeants major and visiting units while they trained. Informal discussions with soldiers revealed that they expected tough, realistic training, and Connelly saw that training facilities were updated and made to simulate real combat. Many of the improvements made during his tenure were the forerunners to those later set up at Fort Irwin's National Training Center when Connelly was Sergeant Major of the Army.

In 1975, the U.S. Army, Europe, was recovering from the effects of the war in Vietnam. For the past ten years, it had served virtually as a replacement depot for Southeast Asia. Training facilities had been allowed to deteriorate and training money was scarce. The attention of both officers and NCOs had been on counterinsurgency warfare, tactics, and doctrine, which obviously could not be applied to the defense of the Fulda Gap. Sergeant Major Connelly observed, "We didn't have any trained commanders, from lieutenant colonel on down. We had company commanders, captains, that didn't know as much as a twelve-month second lieutenant knew in the late fifties, as far as maneuvering a tank company."

After a year and a half Connelly took over as sergeant major of the 1st Armored Division. Since one of its brigades had been

stationed in Grafenwoehr, he had become familiar with the division. But the 1st Armored was one of the most dispersed in Europe, with units scattered across southern Germany; thus Sergeant Major Connelly found himself traveling over the entire area, visiting units and inspecting training programs. In the eighteen months he was in the division, he saw vast improvements in training, a reduction of drug and alcohol abuse, closer community relations with the local German citizenry, and more recreational facilities available for soldiers. Although he regularly put in twelve- to eighteen-hour days, seven days a week, he later judged the improvement in overall readiness and morale well worth the effort. By the time he left Germany in 1977, he had been there four years in three tough assignments.

While in Germany, Connelly was nominated for consideration as the Sixth Army command sergeant major. Since he believed that assignment would not be beneficial for his career and since Maj. Gen. William L. Webb, Jr., the division commanding general, did not want to lose him, his name was pulled from the list. However, General Webb soon found he could not keep Connelly forever.

When Webb was unable to accept a staff college invitation to speak at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, he sent Connelly instead, having a great deal of confidence in the sergeant major's knowledge of training in Europe. Connelly's talk so impressed General Frederick J. Kroesen, the new Forces Command (FORSCOM) commander, that he asked Connelly to consider serving as the FORSCOM sergeant major. Connelly was positive but at the time did not think it would really happen and had only a vague idea of what FORSCOM was or did. He was selected for the post shortly thereafter.

In some ways Sergeant Major Connelly regarded the new assignment as "the only good deal he had in his career." FORSCOM

headquarters at Fort McPherson, Georgia, was only sixty-five miles from his home. He expected to serve three years there, followed by a year somewhere else, and then to retire with thirty years of service. He later learned that he had been selected because of his wide variety of assignments in troop units and because "he had more time as a first sergeant than most of [the other candidates] put together." His tour as an adviser with the National Guard also had been an important factor in his selection.

General Kroesen's marching orders to Connelly were similar to those he would receive later as Sergeant Major of the Army. He told Connelly to visit as many units as possible during his three years, also visiting neighboring reserve and National Guard units as he traveled to active Army posts. Kroesen and his staff also gave him a thorough briefing on FORSCOM, on the major Army commands (MACOMs), and on how they all related to each other and to the reserve component.

Connelly spent most of his FORSCOM tour on the road, meeting most of the sergeants major of divisions, corps, readiness regions, and armies. At the time, the Army was developing the "round-out" concept, whereby National Guard brigades became the third brigades "rounding out" two-brigade active component divisions. Connelly quickly found that the National Guard was no more prepared for war in 1978 than it had been when he was a guardsman in the 1950s or as an adviser in the 1960s. He observed, "I'm seeing the same people. They're just getting older, but they're not getting any better trained."

Guard commanders were responsible for units spread out over the entire state and had no way of visiting all of them during a two-year command tour, except at annual training. Nevertheless, by the time Connelly completed his tour at FORSCOM, he had a





SMA Connelly visits an infantry unit in the field in Germany, 1982.

broader perspective of the Army than before. He knew how it fit together at the highest levels, became more aware of the role of the reserve component, and knew the strengths and weaknesses of the mixed system. General Kroesen was confident of Connelly's ability to understand the "Total Army" and highly valued his sergeant major's observations and reports. Because FORSCOM was the largest major command, his tour as its sergeant major, together with his extensive time in Europe, gave him an excellent preparation for his next assignment.

In 1979, as Sergeant Major of the Army Bainbridge was completing his four-year tour, General Robert M. Shoemaker, the new FORSCOM commander, recommended Sergeant Major Connelly for the position. Competing with seventy-six other command sergeants major, he did not expect to land the position because his twenty-five years of service made him junior to most of the others on the list. He thought he would have a better chance next time and told his wife Bennie, "It doesn't make a damn. I could sit here as FORSCOM Sergeant Major for another three or four years."

At the interview, Connelly thought his chances of selection had disappeared when he noted that General John F. Forrest, the FORSCOM deputy commander, was the board president. Earlier, Connelly had seen the general fall asleep in the middle of a briefing he was presenting, and had shaken him, saying, "General, are you awake? Hell, I'm talking to you." In addition, Connelly hadn't gotten much sleep the night before the interview and had bloodshot eyes from having walked through a dust storm the day before. Fortunately, General Forrest had a sense of humor about the sleeping incident and apparently did not notice Connelly's appearance.

The selection board asked Connelly what he thought of as the greatest problem facing the Army today and, if he were Sergeant Major of the Army, how he would address it. Based on his experience in tank battalions, he identified recruiting, retention, training, and equipment as the Army's most pressing problems. There were no simple remedies—all would need to work hard to correct them.

The candidate list was narrowed to five finalists, and Connelly was pleasantly surprised to find his name among them. Later, General Bernard Rogers, the outgoing Chief of Staff, interviewed the five finalists, starting with Connelly. General Kroesen, who was then scheduled to take command of USAREUR, told Connelly that if he was not selected, he would like him to be his sergeant major. Connelly was again pleased, but he knew he had lost his last chance for yet another tour in Europe when Sergeant Major of the Army Bainbridge informed him that he had been selected.

After the notification, Connelly and Bainbridge spent a week discussing the current actions and problems facing the office. Although Bainbridge's entire office staff left with him, the departing SMA found Connelly an outstanding NCO, Sergeant Don Kelly,

who knew how the Army staff operated and how to get things done in the Pentagon. Throughout Connelly's career, he had never even called the Department of the Army and thus needed an experienced hand to help him with the high-level fundamentals. Later, when Kelly was selected to attend the Sergeants Major Academy, Connelly encouraged him to go regardless of how much he needed him. "After all the hell I have raised about people turning down the Sergeants Major Academy, I can't very well have you not go."

The new Chief of Staff, General Edward C. Meyer, swore in Sergeant Major of the Army Connelly on 2 July 1979, in a small ceremony with a few close friends. The parades would come later. As SMA-designee, Connelly had stopped by Meyer's office earlier, when the general was still the deputy chief of staff for operations. There Meyer had noted:

you and I came up in the same way. We spent a lot of time in the armored and infantry divisions, in TO&E units, and we know how they work. There's one thing I want to do while I'm in office and I want you to help me do it. The majority of the Army is not in divisions. I want you and I to visit as many of those soldiers as we can. When you go to an installation, make sure to visit the support sections. Go to the communications and the engineers. I want you to continue working with the National Guard and reserves.

He further told him to have the MACOMs develop a Noncommissioned Officer Development Program. "Don't write the program yourself. Write a regulation that requires them to do it." In conjunction with his office staff, the new sergeant major wrote the regulation, rewrote it, and submitted it to the Chief of Staff for his approval. General Meyer was pleased: "That is absolutely on target. That's what I want. Put it out."

Sergeant Major of the Army Connelly capitalized on the knowledge, experience, and reputation he had gained as the FORSCOM sergeant major. He "just had to

broaden himself as SMA. No one in the job ever did it before and the only one who knew the job was the one who just left it and retired. The circumstances, SMA staff, and Chief of Staff under which each SMA served were different for each one." After a week in office, he told General Meyer that he didn't yet know how to be Sergeant Major of the Army. The chief simply replied, "I don't know how to be Chief of Staff yet either."

One of Connelly's first official functions was to speak to a group of MACOM chaplains. He had no idea of what to tell them but knew he would have to "clean up his act." In his opening remarks he noted that he been a first sergeant for about five years before he "learned that the chaplain was on his side." This and other anecdotes from his troop duty elicited laughter, broke the ice, and made the rest of his talk go well. It also showed him that he was at his best when being himself and working from his extensive experience in troop units. That, after all, was the reason that he and his predecessors had been selected for the position.

Like the five previous Sergeants Major of the Army, Connelly spent most of his time traveling. He was fortunate to have a first-rate staff in the office to take care of matters when he was on the road. He later observed that today the use of cellular telephones has made such burdens easier. In his time, Connelly often had to stop at public pay phones to find out what was happening back in the Pentagon.

General Meyer, like his predecessors, expected the SMA to take his wife with him on his travels around the Army. He also told him that there were no restrictions on his travels and that he did not need a written report when he returned. Instead, he was to informally brief the chief in person. With Meyer's support, Connelly also saw that his travels included the reserve components—he was *their* sergeant major too. In many cases weekend drill schedules of National Guard and reserve

units allowed him to visit these compounds on Saturday and Sunday while touring active Army units during the week. Connelly also maintained a working relationship with the Readiness Region sergeants major, as well as those at the National Guard Bureau and the Office of the Chief of the Army Reserve. Here, his experiences both as a guardsman and as National Guard adviser gave him insights into the capabilities and problems of the reserve component.

One issue that Connelly wished to avoid was protocol. Years earlier, the Sergeant Major of the Army had been accorded the same protocol as a four-star general. He could take his wife at government expense and stay in quarters sometimes better than those given to two- or three-star generals. Connelly told his staff, "Let's not get wrapped around the axle with this business. Don't let me become a controversial Sergeant Major of the Army. We don't need that and the office doesn't need that." He accordingly ensured that travel reimbursements were made strictly according to regulation. Once, when his wife was paid temporary duty pay, Connelly found out that the finance officer had been instructed to do so. Connelly immediately had the finance office's instructions changed.

Bennie Connelly traveled with her husband on about one-third of his trips—to Korea, Hawaii, Europe, and all over the United States. She spoke at community centers, to officers' wives, to NCO wives, and to the people who ran the facilities that served families. After a trip, just as Sergeant Major Connelly briefed the Chief of Staff, she would brief the chief and other offices dealing with family support issues. As 55 percent of the Army was now married, this area had become increasingly important. The old phrase, "If the Army wanted you to have a wife, it would have issued you one" was changed to "You recruit a soldier, but reenlist a family."



Without the draft, reenlistment was essential to maintaining personnel strength.

Sergeant Major Connelly received about a hundred complaints a month from soldiers throughout the Army. Ninety percent of them could be handled by his office staff over the telephone and usually dealt with minor matters. Often, soldiers had already received responses from their chains of command, but were dissatisfied with the answers or simply wanted their feelings aired at a higher level. One day, one particular soldier would not wait to call. He drove to the Pentagon, walked right into the SMA's office, and told the administrative assistant that he was on orders for Europe and didn't want to go. A call to his unit revealed that he had signed out three weeks before and should have already been overseas. Connelly, who subsequently helped the soldier work out his difficulties, felt he couldn't "let those things get under my skin, because after all, that's what the Sergeant Major of the Army is for." Other soldiers who came into the office had no complaints, but simply wanted to personally see the Sergeant Major of the Army; they had heard him speak before and happened to be in the area. Connelly was pleased that soldiers felt that freedom. As FORSCOM sergeant major, he himself had never dared to visit the Pentagon, because he was "afraid that someone there would ask him a question and he wouldn't know the answer."

The Chief of Staff considered Sergeant Major Connelly a member of his principal staff and had him attend his daily meetings. There Connelly had a chance to report on recent trips or other issues and have direct input into all of the Army staff sections. Connelly also sat on the weekly Army Policy Council, chaired by the Secretary of the Army. In fact, the Chief of Staff told him that there was no briefing or meeting so classified that he couldn't attend it. Connelly, however, had to be selective. There were so many meetings going on in the Pentagon daily that

he could have spent every day of his tour doing nothing but attending meetings.

Connelly's experience at the Seventh Army Training Command and later at FORSCOM proved valuable as the Army activated the National Training Center (NTC) at Fort Irwin, California. The new instructional center had been one of General Kroesen's projects as FORSCOM commander. At first, Connelly could not believe that such an ambitious project would ever see completion. To many at the time, officer and NCO alike, the high-tech tracking and recording of the actual movement of units and the assessment of results of direct and indirect fires seemed something out of "Star Wars."<sup>2</sup> Yet by the time he left office, the NTC was a fact.

While general officers concentrated on the training facilities and high-tech equipment, Sergeant Major Connelly looked to the establishment of a post suitable for soldiers and their families stationed at Fort Irwin. The fort, originally designed only for temporary use, now needed a chapel, post exchange, family quarters, and a host of other facilities necessitated by the fact that the isolated area is about forty miles from the nearest town. At first it seemed that the major construction effort was devoted to ranges and training facilities, while construction of facilities to support families lagged behind. After one visit, Connelly told the Chief of Staff, "The Army is not fulfilling its part of the deal. We have ranges second to none in the whole world, and folks living in a damn base camp." Subsequent changes eventually made Fort Irwin a good post for Army families and a desirable assignment.

The greatest test facing Sergeant Major Connelly was the accession and retention of soldiers. The Army was still somewhat "hol-low," with fully equipped units lacking the

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2. In fact, the computer center at Fort Irwin that tracks movement and fires is nicknamed "Star Wars."

soldiers necessary to fill them out. Instead of eliminating whole units, the Army had chosen to retain them on the rolls, but with reduced manning. Earlier in Germany, Connelly had seen tank companies at gunnery ranges with all of their authorized tanks, but with cooks and clerks manning them due to personnel shortages. During Connelly's tour he saw a steady improvement, not only in numbers but also in quality. In 1979, less than 50 percent of recruits were high school graduates. Four years later, it was over 90 percent. Graduates were easier to train and more likely to finish their enlistment. The appearance, discipline, and morale of soldiers also greatly improved.

Sergeant Major Connelly testified before Congress on several issues that affected soldiers and their families. In 1980 he appeared before the House Committee on Armed Services, along with his counterparts from the other services, to answer questions about medical care for handicapped dependents and about dependent dental care. He stressed the importance of such benefits and their ties with recruitment and reenlistment. In 1983 he spoke to the House Committee on Appropriations on the overall quality of life for soldiers and their families.<sup>3</sup> Such testimonies, as well as congressional interest, did much to help transition the Army to a first-class volunteer force. After fifteen years of existence the Office of the Sergeant Major of the Army, together with counterparts in the other services, had repeatedly proved a reliable

source of information about conditions for enlisted soldiers and their families.

Connelly originally was scheduled for a three-year tour, and like his predecessors thought that three years was the right length. Later, however, General Meyer told him that he did not want to break up the team he had assembled when he took office and asked if Connelly would extend for a year. At long last the idea that the Chief of Staff and the Sergeant Major of the Army ought to serve a four-year tour together had arrived. The precedent would stand. Yet Connelly later said that he "spent the last six months of his fourth year trying not to look tired," adding that in retrospect, the succession of four-year tours over time had prevented some outstanding NCOs from having a chance at the job. Perhaps the Chief of Staff might have shared these sentiments regarding his own job.

Both Connelly and Meyer retired in June 1983. Their four years had seen a vast improvement in the quality of soldiers, regarding both education and discipline. Connelly himself had tirelessly pushed for improvements in the quality of life for soldiers and families, which paid off in attracting high-quality men and women to the Army and encouraging them to reenlist. Most important, he capitalized on his vast experience in individual and unit training to involve NCOs from corporal to sergeant major in their soldiers' training. He drafted the regulation establishing the Noncommissioned Officer Development Program, which created a roadmap of NCO professional development, outlining education requirements and tightening standards of performance. When he became Sergeant Major of the Army in 1979, the Army was hollow. When he left in 1983 it was a better-trained force, manned by high-quality soldiers.

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3. U.S. Congress, House, Committee on Armed Forces, Military Personnel Subcommittee, *Hearings on Civilian Health and Medical Program of the Uniformed Services* (18 June, 15 September 1980), 96th Cong., 2d sess.; Committee on Appropriations, *Hearings on Military Construction Appropriations for 1984* (23 February 1983), 98th Cong., 1st sess.

## Assignments

1950-54	Tank Crewman, Company C, 190th Tank Battalion, Americus, Georgia
1954-55	Tank Crewman, Commander, Platoon Sergeant, First Sergeant, Company B, 761st Tank Battalion, 3d Armored Division, Fort Knox, Kentucky
1955-56	Tank Commander, Platoon Sergeant, Company B, 826th Tank Battalion, 19th Armored Group, Hammelburg; Schweinfurt, Germany
1956-58	Operations Sergeant, Platoon Sergeant, Company B, 826th Tank Battalion, Fort Benning, Georgia
1958-61	Platoon Sergeant, Companies B and C, 2d Battalion, 67th Armor, 4th Armored Division, Fuerth, Germany
1961-62	Platoon Sergeant, Company B, 3d Medium Tank Battalion, 32d Armor, 24th Infantry Division, Fort Stewart, Georgia; Augsburg, Germany
1962-64	First Sergeant, Operations Sergeant, 32d Tank Battalion, Munich, Germany
1964-67	First Sergeant, Company C, 4th Battalion, 68th Armor, 2d Infantry Division, Fort Stewart; Dominican Republic; Fort Knox
1967-69	Chief Enlisted Adviser, 196th Cavalry Squadron, Georgia National Guard, Griffin, Georgia
1969-70	First Sergeant, Troop B, 1st Squadron, 9th Cavalry, 1st Cavalry Division, Republic of Vietnam
1970-73	First Sergeant, Reception Company, 1st Training Brigade; Sergeant Major, 1st and 2d Battalion, Fort Knox
1973	Student, Class #2, Sergeants Major Academy, Fort Bliss, Texas
1973-75	Sergeant Major, 1st Battalion, 35th Armor, 1st Armored Division, Erlangen, Germany
1975-76	Sergeant Major, Seventh Army Training Command, Grafenwoehr, Germany
1976-77	Sergeant Major, 1st Armored Division, Ansbach, Germany
1977-79	Sergeant Major, U.S. Army Forces Command, Fort McPherson, Georgia
1979-83	Sergeant Major of the Army

## Selected Decorations and Awards

Distinguished Service Medal  
 Bronze Star Medal with V Device and two Oak Leaf Clusters  
 Meritorious Service Medal with one Oak Leaf Cluster  
 Air Medal with V Device  
 Army Commendation Medal with two Oak Leaf Clusters  
 Good Conduct Medal  
 Army of Occupation Medal  
 National Defense Service Medal  
 Armed Forces Expeditionary Medal  
 Vietnam Service Medal  
 Republic of Vietnam Cross of Gallantry with Gold Star  
 Republic of Vietnam Campaign Medal  
 Combat Infantryman Badge





# Glen E. Morrell

“I was always fortunate in the Army, I had good people that worked for me.” With those words Glen E. Morrell summarized his four-year term as Sergeant Major of the Army. An unassuming man, Sergeant Major Morrell was born 26 May 1936 in Wick, West Virginia, near Wheeling. In this rural environment, young Morrell became an avid fisherman and reader. His father worked for the Hope Natural Gas Company, now part of Exxon, while his mother kept the house in order. Glen Morrell was his parents’ youngest offspring, and his four sisters and two brothers had already grown up when he reached adulthood.

Morrell remembered his parents instilling discipline in him at an early age—whipping was the standard punishment. Having “respect for other people” and “giving everybody a chance” were hallmarks of growing up in the tiny village of Stumptown, where Morrell learned many lessons that later proved useful in the Army. “People that came from the larger cities seemed to have more problems,” he noticed.

Glen Morrell attended the public school in Normantown, West Virginia, a six-

or seven-mile bus trip from Stumptown. The school building housed all grades, including high school. Morrell felt lucky—their school had a gymnasium. The only school sport was basketball, but there were many outdoor adventures in that mountainous area. “I read a lot,” Morrell recalled, and “we never even had a television until after I came into the Army.” Even listening to the radio was a rare pastime since the batteries were expensive and the area had no public power.

His best subjects were math, science, and history. His teachers were very thorough and very strict. Some had served in World War II and carried an air of military discipline with them. People took schooling seriously.

While in secondary school, Morrell worked at several part-time jobs. Most involved farm work in the local fields, earning him “a lot of money” for that time. A boy normally received \$1.50 for a day’s wage, but Morrell worked especially hard and eventually earned up to \$2.00 over the daily average. In addition, his own family always had a large garden and farm animals that kept him busy.

Morrell completed his high school courses in early 1954, graduating in May of that year. At the time his local prospects seemed limited. Except for the gas company, that part of West Virginia offered few job opportunities. Not wanting to take on some short-term job, Morrell turned to his long-time interest in the Army.

"All I wanted to do was join the Army and jump out of airplanes," he later said. Morrell's father was a veteran of World War I, and one brother had served in World War II. Another brother had been a paratrooper in the Korean War. But they had all been drafted and had a hard time understanding why young Glen wanted to volunteer. In the fall of 1954, however, he enlisted.

Morrell had enlisted for service in the 11th Airborne Division, but was assigned initially to the 82d Airborne Division.<sup>1</sup> After a two-day stay for shots and screening at Fort Jackson, South Carolina, Morrell and his fellow recruits traveled to Camp Gordon, Georgia, for eight weeks of basic training. There they lived in World War II—vintage wooden barracks with coal furnaces. In the open squad bays there were no lockers, only wooden rods behind each bunk bed. However, as the recruits were allowed no civilian clothes and few other personal belongings, the lack of space seemed inconsequential.

Morrell's fellow recruits came from all over the United States. They were "a pretty good bunch of people" and "we all worked together, . . . that was the only way you were going to get out of the doggone place." The cadre trained the recruits hard, even on weekends. The sergeants, all Korean War veterans, did all the instructing. "They were all good people," Morrell remembered, "and knew what they were doing." The only offi-

cer he remembered seeing throughout the training cycle was his company commander.

Basic training had not changed much since World War II and Korea. Morrell and the others learned how to use the M1 rifle, still the standard issue. No "bolos" were allowed.<sup>2</sup> Each recruit remained on the rifle range until he qualified. The men also learned how to use the early rocket launchers—bazookas—and to defend themselves from the effects of tear gas and chlorine. In addition, they practiced dismounted drill every day and received instruction in general military subjects. Each trainee went through day and night infiltration courses. There were also inspections nearly every day: "You might have a full field layout or just stand-by in the barracks area, or the whole barracks, or you would have a rifle inspection, or an in-ranks inspection in Class A uniform." While there was little formal physical training, the trainees were in good shape since they "walked or ran everywhere."

There were no discipline problems. "You know, everybody was pretty serious back then," he recalled. "They wanted to graduate and get the hell out of there." The only real concern was "trying to clean a weapon to the satisfaction of the people who were inspecting it."

The basic trainees' food ration was small in the mid-1950s. Looking back on his own experience, Morrell recalled eating lots of C-rations "even in the mess hall, about twice a week." At other times the troops ate cold cuts rotated out of emergency storage supplies. Morrell remembered serving on the KP detail five or six times during his training

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1. At that time Army volunteers could enlist for service in specific units.

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2. A "bolo," technically a shot that completely missed the black bullseye on the firing range, was also the name given to a soldier who failed to make a passing grade in marksmanship. The term was often extended to cover any instance of failing to achieve a qualifying standard.



cycle. After his retirement, Sergeant Major Morrell would bring the benefits of those early experiences to his work on the "Task Force 2000" food study that critiqued the new MRE and tray rations.<sup>3</sup>

Private Morrell received a brief leave after his graduation from basic training. Afterwards he reported to Fort Bragg, North Carolina, where he was assigned to Battery A, 319th Field Artillery, 82d Airborne Division. He wanted to be in the infantry but was assigned to the field artillery instead, in accordance with the "needs of the service." Morrell recalled that soldiers of that era did not receive any advanced individual training (AIT) in a formal school setting, and instead learned from what amounted to on-the-job training in their assigned unit. There were advantages to that system, but it was hard for the unit to track the proper training of each individual, and such informal systems worked best only when the number of replacement troops coming into the Army remained small. Morrell trained on the "split-trailed" 105-mm. howitzer especially designed for airborne operations, but spent much of his first enlistment working as a forward observer.

Soon after his arrival at the 82d in 1955, Morrell went to the jump school at Fort Bragg. This three-week course, little different from modern training, kept students "on the go" all day. Training consisted of a lot of running and jumps from a 34-foot

tower, the highest tower then in use.<sup>4</sup> Morrell had a few problems but quickly got over them. "I was always scared of heights, but it's just different being in an airplane." The new paratroopers made five qualifying jumps before receiving their wings. Morrell liked the thrill of jumping and continued to jump throughout his long career.

When his first enlistment in the Army expired, Sergeant Morrell left the service. He considered becoming a highway patrolman but was told he would have to wait for training. In January 1958 Morrell decided to reenlist in the Army. "I found out that I really liked the Army after I got out," he said. Since a soldier could reenlist for a specific unit, Sergeant Morrell asked for the 82d Airborne Division.

Shortly after reporting for duty, Morrell received orders posting him to Germany. Although he thought he was heading for Baumholder, his orders were changed in transit. "I didn't know I was going to Berlin until I got to Frankfurt." Morrell was assigned to the Combat Support Company, 2d Battle Group, 6th Infantry, a good unit with high morale and good leadership, with several "old combat veterans" providing cohesion and continuity.

Initially assigned as squad leader of a 4.2-inch mortar section, Sergeant Morrell later worked in the Fire Direction Center when the sergeant there went on emergency leave. When that NCO returned, Morrell filled a vacancy in the mortar platoon as platoon sergeant and later worked in the regiment's reconnaissance unit.

Once a year, the Berlin troops trained at Grafenwoehr, Germany. More frequently, they used smaller training areas including the Gruenewald forest in Berlin. There they

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3. Meals, Ready to Eat (MREs), are a prepackaged field ration, which replaced the combat ration (C-ration). C-rations, which were canned, then packaged in cardboard, were bulkier, but the MRE required water for preparation. When water was scarce or hard to transport, the MRE caused logistical and morale problems. Tray rations are meals prepackaged on serving trays meant to be heated and served in field kitchens, much like airline food. SMA Morrell felt that the initial problems with tray rations resulted from a lack of training in the proper use of the new equipment.

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4. As Sergeant Major of the Army, Morrell tried to end the use of the 250-foot towers at Fort Benning. He felt too many soldiers were injured there.

used subcaliber devices to conduct exercises, but it was hard to train properly in an urban area. Morrell described his unit as “very proficient. The leadership was good. We had good officers. It was just a good unit.” Every Friday the Berlin troops held a parade.

While stationed in Berlin, Sergeant Morrell graduated from the local NCO academy. It was a small school, with four training platoons, and all the students were E-5s and E-6s. The academy emphasized drill and ceremonies, the conduct of physical training and inspections, and general “spit and polish.” Classes on how to plan and present training classes were also emphasized, and Morrell considered the instructors good, but there was little in the way of tactical instruction.

During his first enlistment Corporal Morrell had married Karen Wade of Parkersburg, West Virginia. When Morrell reported for duty in Germany, Karen remained stateside for nearly a year because the waiting list for quarters in Germany was long. Yet when they became available, they proved among the best the Morrells encountered.

At that time no “structured programs”—organized communities or activities—existed. Soldiers made friends and found things to do in their off-time as best they could. “We survived,” Morrell later said, “and had a good family life. I was always home. I didn’t have money to go do anything else.” Then, an E-5 made \$205 a month. Morrell remembered, however, that a good meal with a bottle of wine cost only \$5.00 on the local economy. But with virtually no promotion opportunities from 1958 to 1960, money remained tight for soldiers like Sergeant Morrell.

In 1960 the 6th Infantry’s combat support company was phased out, and Sergeant Morrell transferred to the 14th Armored Cavalry, stationed in Fulda. At the time, Morrell considered changing his field

artillery MOS and remaining in Berlin.<sup>5</sup> However, he decided to accept the transfer and remain in the Field Artillery to better his chances of promotion. Consequently, he spent the next two years in a mechanized howitzer battery performing reconnaissance and working in the Fire Direction Center.

Shortly after Sergeant Morrell arrived in Fulda, the Soviet and East German governments erected the Berlin Wall. During the prolonged international crisis that followed, President John F. Kennedy extended the overseas tours of all troops in Germany. In the meantime, Morrell and his fellow soldiers of the 14th Armored Cavalry spent most of their time patrolling the critical border areas they shared with the 2d Cavalry. “Every time you turned around you were on alert,” Morrell later remembered.

New tensions and discipline problems also began to arise. Unit leadership was inexperienced, and some NCOs were former officers who had accepted positions as noncommissioned officers in order to stay on active duty during previous reductions in the force structure. Morrell remembered that such men often lacked both the skills and motivation required of good NCOs. Then, in the early 1960s, the problems of drugs and racial tension also began to appear in military units. When Sergeant Morrell received orders transferring him back to the United States early in 1962, he looked forward to the new assignment.

Before leaving Germany, Sergeant Morrell had read about the Special Forces. “I’m always looking for adventure,” he said, “that’s the place to go.” At reenlistment time he signed up for the new outfit. When he reported to Fort Bragg, North Carolina, he underwent Special Forces training—“survival-type skills and working in small

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5. The numbered and assigned career field to which each soldier was assigned and which, in part, determined promotion opportunities.

groups.” The trainees for what became the Green Berets underwent medical, communications, and engineer training. They learned how to conduct clandestine operations and how to train indigenous people. With his field artillery background, Morrell naturally “was the heavy weapons guy.”

After a lengthy field evaluation of the Special Forces skills of the new men, they reported to units. As Special Forces soldiers, they later received language training according to probable deployment areas. But at that time they “trained based on what was happening in Vietnam.” For that reason he received French language instruction at first, since the French had worked so long with the peoples of Vietnam. Later in his Special Forces career, Morrell also picked up Spanish.

Sergeant Morrell was soon promoted to staff sergeant and assigned to the newly activated Company C, 5th Special Forces Group, serving as the heavy weapons sergeant in an “A” Detachment.<sup>6</sup> Nevertheless, advanced instruction emphasized cross-training in all the occupational specialties of the detachment. There were also many field training exercises and practice airborne operations. Detachment members learned to work with indigenous people, conduct raids and ambushes, and operate from small boats.

In January 1963, Morrell’s detachment of the 5th Special Forces Group received orders for TDY in Vietnam. Deployed for a six-month period, the men found their orders changed when they arrived in Saigon. The U.S. command there now planned to assign “A” teams throughout the country. Morrell’s detachment was initially assigned to War



Morrell as a young soldier in Vietnam.

Zone D in the III Corps area north of Saigon. There they operated from the tiny village of Nuoc Vang, north of Phuoc Vinh City.

The Special Forces mission around Nuoc Vang was to secure the village area and train the local Vietnamese security forces, including some ethnic Cambodians. Although French forces had operated there nearly a decade earlier and little had happened since that time, there were serious logistical problems. “We went in there and I didn’t have ammunition for my M1 rifle,” Morrell recalled. He had one clip for the rifle and one for his .45-caliber pistol. To supply

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6. Although Sergeant Morrell appreciated his promotion, he was frustrated by a confusing uniform change which occurred at nearly the same time. New pay grades were added and the rank structure was adjusted in such a way that Morrell found himself a rank higher wearing the same stripes.





Morrell at his base camp in Vietnam.

their personal weapons, the U.S. forces had to take the ammunition from the machine guns they had already found in the village. The detachment was without adequate ammunition for nearly ten days before the command in Saigon ordered a resupply.

During Morrell's first tour in Vietnam, the U.S. forces had good relations with the local people since they brought in money and purchased all their food from local suppliers. Morrell's detachment also trained the militia-like defense forces, laid mine fields around the village, and staged ambushes. There was little fighting, "just skirmishes here and there," but "we got ambushed a few times while hauling supplies in from Phuoc Vinh." At the time, helicopters were scarce, and everything was transported in convoys using World War II-vintage trucks.

After returning from his first tour in Vietnam, Morrell was reassigned to Company B, 5th Special Forces Group. During that time he received his promotion to sergeant, first class.

In 1964 Morrell returned to Vietnam for a second tour, this one lasting a full year. The airplane which carried him to Saigon also brought the colors of the 5th Special Forces Group, now permanently stationed there. From Saigon, Morrell flew to Pleiku and then conveyed to Dak Pek, the location of a split A Detachment that also covered Dak To. Dak Pek "was way out in the middle of nowhere," an established but isolated camp "in the high country up in the mountains," along the north edge of the II Corps area, close to the Laotian border. Morrell's detachment worked with five companies of Montagnards, the ethnic tribal peoples of that area. The leaders of those well-seasoned troops had served with the French, and Morrell remembered them as good, effective soldiers.

The remote location of the Special Forces camp at Dak Pek posed serious operational and logistical problems. Everything had to be brought in by convoy from Pleiku, and it was difficult to get air support. The mountainous terrain made tactical operations difficult also. "It took you all day to get to the top of one of the mountains, where you had to go back and go down on the other side." The normal operational routine was to go out for three days and work back to the camp at Dak Pek. During this time enemy activity accelerated with elements of the regular North Vietnamese Army engaging American forces in January 1965.

At the conclusion of his second tour in Vietnam, Sergeant First Class Morrell returned to duty with the Special Forces Training Group at Fort Bragg. There he attended the Jumpmaster School in 1965 and in late in 1966 received orders assigning him to the 8th Special Forces Group in Panama.

Morrell reported there early in 1967 after a period of temporary duty for Spanish language training in Washington, D.C. He was assigned to Company A, 8th Special Forces Group, in Panama.

At the Jungle Operations Training Center the Special Forces trained soldiers from many different Latin American nations. Most of the instruction reflected the experiences and tactical doctrine developed in Southeast Asia. "We had a lot of airborne operations." While there, Morrell also served on the local marksmanship team, but his overall evaluation of the assignment was unfavorable. Although his wife and children joined him in Panama, they had to live in flimsy temporary quarters built on stilts. Morrell judged it "the worst quarters I ever lived in." His assignment in Panama was supposed to last three years, but in 1969, two years later, Morrell was again ordered to Vietnam.

Since 1966 the 5th Special Forces Group had operated the MACV Reconnaissance-Commando (Recondo) School near Nha Trang. Morrell knew many instructors stationed there, and they requested his assignment to the school. He remained there until the last three months of his tour. Transferred to the headquarters at Nha Trang, Morrell became the local purchase NCO. "I'd go down and buy items that the 'A' camps wanted, but you couldn't get through the regular supply channels."

In 1970 Morrell left Vietnam for the last time. Later, he reflected on the two and a half years he spent there: "It was a shame that so many of our young people got killed over there in that quagmire, but that's history." He felt that the Army had done a superb job through more than a decade of commitment there. The political climate back home, however, had steadily eroded the support the American troops needed.

Approved for promotion to E-8 when he left Vietnam, Morrell thought he would

be assigned to the 10th Special Forces Group at Fort Devens, Massachusetts. He requested a change in his orders, however, and returned to Panama. During his second tour there, from 1970-73, Morrell served as first sergeant of Headquarters Company, 8th Special Forces Group, then as the group intelligence sergeant.

In the spring of 1973, Master Sergeant Morrell was selected to attend the new Sergeants Major Academy at Fort Bliss, Texas. For a soldier who had spent nearly twenty years in field assignments, the academic environment proved quite a challenge at first. "I did do some hard work there," said Morrell, noting the great amount of reading required. In addition, the students had to lead discussion groups and take academic classes. There were approximately eighteen other Special Forces soldiers at the academy then, and they assisted one another. "We worked together and studied together. We probably had a 'leg up' on a lot of people that didn't have such a close-knit group." While the informal group support of the Special Forces students was not always popular with the staff and other students, Morrell welcomed the help.

While he was at the academy, Morrell also entered a night Associate Degree program which he believed would help his career. Although he had previously "worked every correspondence course under the sun," college courses were a new experience. Nevertheless, Morrell took CLEP tests and plowed through the necessary coursework to receive his degree from El Paso Community College.<sup>7</sup>

Initially, the Sergeants Major Academy graduates were greeted suspiciously by other senior NCOs. For his part, Morrell sympathized with those noncommissioned officers

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7. College Level Examination Program (CLEP) tests were administered by a college board. Many colleges awarded undergraduate credit based upon a given score on any one of the several tests.

who had been unable to attend the academy for one reason or another, and felt that promotion boards often put undue emphasis on college work as opposed to troop experience. Later, as Sergeant Major of the Army, Morrell declared, "you need to look at the whole person and see where they've been assigned." Unit personnel policies often deprived NCOs of opportunities because it was difficult to "set aside the money and resources and let people go to school." Still, Morrell knew the day was coming when the academy diploma would be the key to promotion to command sergeant major. He graduated in December 1973.

Following graduation, Master Sergeant Morrell moved to Fort Riley, Kansas. There he served as first sergeant of Company A, 1st Battalion, 2d Infantry, and later of the Headquarters and Headquarters Company of the 1st Infantry Division. Three times during his stay at Fort Riley, Morrell requested assignment to the Ranger school. The 1st Ranger Battalion of the 2d Infantry had been activated, and Morrell was anxious to become part of that organization. Each time his request was denied, however, largely because the 1st Infantry Division was a REFORGER unit and would not release senior NCOs.

In March 1976 Morrell reported to the Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) at St. John's University in St. Cloud, Minnesota. He received his E-9 stripes there in a special ceremony arranged by the local professor of military science. A noncommissioned officer who had always enjoyed being in a field environment with troops, Sergeant Major Morrell did not particularly care for ROTC duty. He considered the Army ROTC cadre outstanding, but the duty just wasn't his "cup of tea." At that time military personnel were not particularly welcome on college campuses, and Morrell noted that some members of the staff did not wear their uniforms home. The number of cadets was

small and they focused on academic work; only about a dozen graduates received Army commissions each year.

Nevertheless, duty at St. John's provided Morrell the time to do many things with his family. He could also indulge his lifelong passion for fishing and hunting. He swam a great deal and increased his running capacity. But his primary job at St. John's was to manage the office and the enlisted staff. His small detachment consisted of a master sergeant, a civilian "supply sergeant," and various civilian and military clerks. Morrell handled large amounts of correspondence and helped conduct field training exercises at nearby Camp Ripley. But he never took part in the ROTC summer camp since he arrived too late for the 1976 exercise and left the detachment in January 1977.

In December 1976 Morrell was selected for the position of sergeant major of the 1st Ranger Battalion, 75th Infantry, at Fort Stewart, Georgia. The return to duty with troops excited him and offered the prospect of finally going to Ranger school. He reported to the Ranger training center at Fort Benning, Georgia, in January 1977. The transfer was so abrupt that Morrell had to leave his wife to settle their affairs in Minnesota.

Morrell considered the Ranger school "the best realistic training I ever received in the Army." Difficult as it was in the winter months, Morrell was able to use his lengthy experience to help many other students. He proved particularly proficient in land navigation and often found himself "on the point" during field problems. Morrell lost a lot of weight during Ranger training and was exhausted. "You had to be physically fit and you had to be mentally tough" to make it through the training. The oldest Ranger student at forty-one, Morrell was the Distinguished Honor Graduate of his class.

Upon completion of Ranger school, Sergeant Major Morrell reported to the 75th



Infantry at Fort Stewart. There his duty consisted of "training day and night, seven days a week . . . All we did was train, train, train and running exercises," he said. "We worked a lot with the forerunners of Delta Force, Blue Light." Much of the training focused on counterterrorist operations. Some excellent training took place in the Mojave Desert. There were no double standards determined by duty position or rank. K. C. Leuer and Joseph Stringham, both of whom later became general officers, were "great trainers," who trained their soldiers "in all aspects of what their mission in life was." As a result, the troops always had "sky-high" morale. "You had standards there, and discipline."

As anywhere else, however, there were problems to solve. The battalion's remarkably fast pace caused a high rate of personnel turnover. There was also a general lack of experienced leadership available for assignment to the unit. In addition, the 1st Ranger Battalion had many well-educated soldiers. Some had college degrees, and many went on to Officer Candidate School, college ROTC programs, or the U.S. Military Academy after they left the service. Sergeant Major Morrell regretted that many good soldiers left the unit after three or four years for either officer training or careers outside the service.

Morrell returned to Germany in July 1979 and was assigned to the 10th Special Forces Detachment at Flint Kaserne in Bad Toelz until October 1981. Duty as the command sergeant major of Special Forces, Airborne, Europe, was demanding. "Every day saw something new in that place," Morrell recalled. As the command sergeant major, Morrell assisted the commander, who was in charge of the entire kaserne, as well as supervising military operations. The Seventh Army NCO Academy there received many official visitors. In addition, the Special Forces ran a Platoon Confidence Course, providing mini-Ranger training for

platoons from units all over Europe. Sergeant Major Morrell still found time to ski, hunt, and fish, however.

Following his second tour in Germany, Sergeant Major Morrell was reassigned to Headquarters, U.S. Army Recruiting Command (USAREC), Fort Sheridan, Illinois. At the time, Morrell regretted an assignment that took him away from troops. However, he found recruiting duty rewarding, and he learned a great deal. With no previous experience in this field, he found it difficult at first to function as the command sergeant major. However, the large number of combat veterans serving as recruiters gave Sergeant Major Morrell a common frame of reference. He was pleased to find the USAREC commander, General Howard G. Crowell, Jr., interested in working with him "to make life a little bit better for recruiters. Good people recruit good people." He found that the noncommissioned officers assigned to the Recruiting Command were excellent and highly motivated soldiers.

In his new position, Morrell focused on soldier and family problems of the recruiters in the field. One critical task, he found, was to match areas of assignment with specific recruiting sergeants. Morrell saw firsthand the problems with housing and medical care the recruiters and their families faced when there were no military installations in the area. He also had to work with the command to overcome the special difficulties recruiting offices faced in high-crime neighborhoods, while also working to secure better housing for recruiters, especially in high-cost areas. But he gave particular attention to Army pay and promotion policies that caused a hardship for recruiters, since recruiting duty often diminished their promotion prospects. He made several recommendations to the Recruiting Command regarding the issue, including assigning fewer sergeants (E-5) to recruiting duty and providing retention incen-



SMA Morrell with his Chief of Staff, General John A. Wickham, Jr.

tives. Although he achieved limited success in these areas, the experiences at USAREC provided him with important insights which he later used to the Army's advantage as sergeant major at FORSCOM and as Sergeant Major of the Army.

The FORSCOM commander, General Richard Cavazos, was looking for a command sergeant major to replace outgoing Sgt. Maj. Robert Ivey in June 1982. At Ivey's suggestion, Cavazos selected Glen Morrell.

At FORSCOM, Sergeant Major Morrell again focused on training. Moreover, he found that he had to spend a lot of time "going out and really trying to find out about the policies that were implemented by the Department of the Army and FORSCOM." He sought to ascertain if they were actually workable "in the field." And it was a big field, one that included all divisional units in the continental United States (CONUS) as well as in Alaska and Panama. In addition, it

included all of the major National Guard and reserve commands.

At FORSCOM, Morrell found a considerable number of problems to solve. For example, it was difficult to find qualified people to man the readiness regions established to assist the reserve components. The soldiers who staffed those regions faced many of the same difficulties as the recruiters. Morrell found that the reserves were good soldiers who really wanted to do an outstanding job. "The reason you find good units or some bad units" depended upon "leadership, getting people qualified, and resources." When the Guard and reserve senior NCOs began attending the annual FORSCOM Command Sergeants Major Conference, closer working relationships began to develop with the active force as well as between the Guard and reserve.

When General John A. Wickham, Jr., became Army Chief of Staff, he began the selection process for the Sergeant Major of the Army who would serve with him. General Cavazos recommended Sergeant Major Morrell. After careful deliberation, Wickham selected Morrell, who received his formal appointment three weeks after his interview. He took his oath in a "very moving ceremony" in the office of the new Chief of Staff. With his family and many friends looking on, Sergeant Major Morrell began a fast-paced four-year tour. From Morrell's perspective, General Wickham had the interest of the whole Army—the enlisted people, the noncommissioned officers, the officers, and the families—at heart.

In his initial guidance to the new Sergeant Major of the Army, Wickham told Morrell to be himself and "go do the things that needed to be done in the Army." Morrell later stated that "what a Sergeant Major of the Army does depends on the Chief of Staff." General Wickham listened and seated the Sergeant Major of the Army on his right

at staff meetings and, according to Morrell, "we pushed a lot of things through that would not have been accomplished if it hadn't been for all of us working together."

Sergeant Major Morrell spent about 25 percent of his time as Sergeant Major of the Army in his office at the Pentagon. Answering the many official inquiries and letters from the field required a lot of research. Besides his small staff, Morrell brought young soldiers to the office from the administration school at Fort Jackson, South Carolina. Even when he was not present, he knew that his office staff worked many nights and weekends handling requests from congressional committees, soldiers, their families, and retirees.

He often gave testimony to Congress on such issues as soldiers' quality of life, the needs of service families, and related financial matters. In addition, Morrell also gave periodic briefings to members of the general staff, to Secretary of the Army John O. Marsh, Jr., and to Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger. Morrell felt Weinberger "was interested in soldiers; . . . interested in families; and . . . interested in the services." In turn, Morrell attended many briefings by agencies such as the Military Personnel Center (MILPERCEN).

Sergeant Major Morrell focused on several major initiatives during his tenure. Chief among them was the continued development of the Noncommissioned Officer Education System (NCOES) that he believed was vital to establishing a solid corps of NCOs. During Morrell's term of office the Primary Leadership Course and the Primary Noncommissioned Officer Course combined to form the Primary Leader Development Course, while the Sergeants Major Academy took over the responsibility for developing the common core training for the NCOES. Morrell constantly battled for resources to enhance NCO educational programs. Many





Morrell (second from right) with fellow command sergeants major.

commanders, and a even a few noncommissioned officers, still needed to be convinced of the need for the NCOES.

Sergeant Major Morrell's other initiatives included the improvement of enlisted quarters. Among other things, he felt better quarters would encourage noncommissioned officers to live on post, closer to the men with whom they worked. Morrell also endeavored to improve the quality of life of

single soldiers by bringing their concerns to the attention of the general staff.

In fact, Sergeant Major Morrell could remember few goals that he did not achieve, at least in part, while he was Sergeant Major of the Army. He had hoped to correct an overbalance in some occupational specialties. He also wanted to see stricter enforcement of weight, physical training, and substance abuse standards. He convinced the

Army staff to reduce the time an NCO could remain on active duty after refusing an assignment or attendance at the Sergeants Major Academy. However, Morrell wanted it reduced even further.

As Sergeant Major of the Army, Glen Morrell took several major trips to military "hot spots." He found constant stress among American troops in Korea and examined their training along the Demilitarized Zone. He noted the difficult living conditions U.S. troops and dependent families encountered there, and made several recommendations for improvement. Morrell also recommended lengthening the tour of duty in Korea to alleviate the personnel problems resulting from the constant turnover of soldiers—a suggestion that was not supported.

While Morrell did not go to Grenada during Operation URGENT FURY, he did visit later to discuss the operation with the sergeants major at their locations in CONUS. He noted the confusion during that operation, the problems with airborne and interservice cooperation, and the need for more combined operations training. He later regarded with pride the effect increased emphasis on NCO training had on Operation DESERT SHIELD/STORM.

Sergeant Major Morrell traveled with General Wickham to South America, China, Fort Bliss (to speak at the Sergeants Major Academy), and Fort Bragg. But for the most part Morrell tried to travel alone. He found that "they had a structured briefing everywhere General Wickham went," and thus preferred to divorce himself from such "dog and pony shows" when possible. Although he tried to visit as many active and reserve installations as possible, when it came to choosing destinations, "a lot of the determination was made by calls from the major command sergeants major."

The Sergeant Major of the Army wanted to meet with troops and families and gather

information on training and policy issues that the Chief of Staff might miss. "I always enjoyed talking to soldiers," Morrell said, "That's what I wanted to do." During a visit he would routinely get up early and take physical training with the troops or by himself. Later, he would pay a call to the commander and the host sergeant major, then meet with small groups of troops. He was careful never to interfere with training. Twice each year Sergeant Major Morrell visited Germany, but traveled to American troops stationed in Italy, Turkey, and Greece less frequently. His wife often accompanied him and visited dependent quarters, the Army community service organizations, commissaries, medical facilities, schools, and post exchanges. She also spoke at women's luncheons and wives' clubs.

The highlight of Morrell's tenure as Sergeant Major of the Army was his ten-day trip to the People's Republic of China in the fall of 1986. The first major visit by Army personnel since General George C. Marshall was Secretary of State, it reestablished an American military presence there. Incidentally, its purpose was to enlist the support of the Chinese for talks with North Korea. Sergeant Major Morrell and his wife accompanied Army Chief of Staff Wickham and his wife, as did Col. John Shalikashvili, a Medical Corps officer, a political affairs officer, and others. The Chinese arranged a special program for the wives while their military officials arranged tours and meetings for the military staff.

The demonstration of a Chinese division on the attack impressed Morrell. He inspected their equipment, which he found obsolete, and talked to Chinese soldiers who showed little reluctance to speak their minds. Morrell conducted briefings on the role of the noncommissioned officer in the U.S. Army. He also visited a Chinese military academy, a field artillery school, several ships, and an air force base. He noted wryly

that it was difficult to figure out who was in charge in Chinese military formations. They appeared to have no pattern of control, although the performance of Chinese counterterrorist teams impressed him greatly. Visits to the Great Wall and the Forbidden City added interest to the trip and a perspective on the Chinese culture.

As Sergeant Major of the Army, Glen Morrell of course participated in many social events and ceremonies. With other senior enlisted personnel, he met President Ronald Reagan at the interment of the Unknown Soldier of the Vietnam War and attended embassy affairs, congressional breakfasts and luncheons, as well as Memorial Day and Independence Day celebrations. The governor of West Virginia honored Sergeant Major Morrell as did the Veterans of Foreign Wars. In turn, he presented many medals, certificates, and letters of commendation to enlisted soldiers.

Of all his accomplishments as Sergeant Major of the Army, Morrell felt that the most

rewarding was "being able to do something for the good of the enlisted people and the noncommissioned officer corps." It was an honor "being their representative to the Chief of Staff, the Department of the Army staff, the senior leaders in the Department of Defense, and at the congressional level." Throughout his tenure, he stuck by his principles and "always treated people like I'd like to be treated."

SMA Glen E. Morrell retired from active service on 30 June 1987. General Wickham attended the impressive ceremony at Fort Myer. The Old Guard honored Sergeant Major Morrell with a review conducted entirely by its noncommissioned officers. Morrell affirmed that the "American soldier . . . has been trained and has the desire to be the best that there is at whatever their job might be. They'll go the extra mile time and time again if they are trained and provided excellent leadership." Glen E. Morrell served as an American soldier for thirty-three years.



## Assignments

1954-57	Cannoneer, Forward Observer, Battery A, 319th Field Artillery, 82d Airborne Division, Fort Bragg, North Carolina
1958-60	Squad Leader, Platoon Sergeant, Combat Support Company, 2d Battle Group, 6th Infantry, Berlin, Germany
1960-62	Artillery Operations and Intelligence Sergeant, 14th Armored Cavalry Regiment, Fulda, Germany
1962-63	Heavy Weapons Sergeant, Staff Sergeant, Company C, 5th Special Forces Group, Fort Bragg; Vietnam
1964-65	Heavy Weapons Leader, Company B, 5th Special Forces Group, Vietnam
1965-66	Heavy Weapons Instructor, Sergeant, First Class, Special Forces Training Group, Fort Bragg
1967-69	Heavy Weapons Leader, Company A, 8th Special Forces Group, Panama
1969-70	Heavy Weapons Leader, HHC, 5th Special Forces Group, Vietnam
1970-73	Operations Sergeant, Company B; Assistant Intelligence Sergeant, First Sergeant, HHC, 8th Special Forces Group; Intelligence Sergeant, Headquarters and Headquarters Detachment, 3d Special Forces Battalion, 7th Special Forces Group, Panama
1973-74	Student, Sergeants Major Academy, Fort Bliss, Texas
1974-76	First Sergeant, Company A, 1st Battalion, 2d Infantry; First Sergeant, HHC, 1st Infantry Division, Fort Riley, Kansas
1976-77	Chief Instructor, Reserve Officer Training Corps Detachment, St. John's University, St. Cloud, Minnesota
1977-79	Command Sergeant Major, 1st Ranger Battalion, 75th Infantry, Fort Stewart, Georgia
1979-81	Command Sergeant Major, Special Forces Detachment (Abn), Europe, Bad Toelz, Germany
1981-82	Command Sergeant Major, U.S. Army Recruiting Command, Fort Sheridan, Illinois
1982-83	Command Sergeant Major, U.S. Army Forces Command, Fort McPherson, Georgia
1983-87	Sergeant Major of the Army

## Selected Decorations and Awards

Distinguished Service Medal  
 Meritorious Service Medal with two Oak Leaf Clusters  
 Army Commendation Medal with three Oak Leaf Clusters  
 Good Conduct Medal  
 Army of Occupation Medal  
 National Defense Service Medal  
 Armed Forces Expeditionary Medal  
 Vietnam Service Medal  
 Overseas Service Ribbon  
 Army Service Ribbon  
 NCO Education Ribbon  
 Republic of Vietnam Campaign Medal  
 Combat Infantryman Badge



# Julius W. Gates

**B**orn in the Piedmont region of North Carolina on 14 June 1941, Julius W. (Bill) Gates was the sixth of nine children. With a farm to maintain, the Gates family “believed in hard work.” Gates’ father eventually bought a service station and a new family home nearby. His family operated the service station and continued to work on the farm.

Gates attended grade school in Carrboro, North Carolina, and high school in Chapel Hill. “We had about a mile walk to the local bus stop, followed with a five-mile bus ride.” School was a good experience, and the teachers enjoyed good relations with the parents. They concentrated on the basics and made sure that each student had a firm foundation. In high school Gates’ best subjects were history and geography. Math was a real challenge. Active in sports, Gates played baseball and football in high school. At age sixteen he began working part-time as a service assistant for the local Ford dealer.

After three years of high school and with his parents’ reluctant consent, Bill Gates enlisted in the Army on 12 August 1958. He was seventeen when he signed up for three years. “It’s what I always wanted to

do,” he said. “I was influenced by people coming back from the Second World War and Korea. I was impressed by the uniforms when they came home.” His brother was a veteran of World War II, having served in the Pacific. Three of his uncles had served in the European theater and had participated in the D-day invasion at Normandy.

After initial processing at Raleigh, North Carolina, Gates reported to Fort Jackson, South Carolina, for further processing, basic training, and advanced individual training. Gates spent a week and a half at the reception station, where he and his fellow recruits “were administered tests, issued clothing, and given medical examinations.” Restricted to the company area, the new recruits could not even visit the post exchange. “We performed some work details . . . I was given an opportunity to learn the meaning of KP, and I never volunteered for it again . . . it appeared to me most of our time was spent waiting.”

At the reception station, Gates and his fellow recruits listened to stories from the “old soldiers,” who themselves had been in the Army a month or less. The new men





Gates as a young soldier.

were told of the tough discipline and terrors of life on “Tank Hill” at Fort Jackson. Gates found some basis of truth in the stories when he reported to his basic training company. The trainees were “herded like cattle [and] billeted in World War II—era, two-story, open-bay barracks with rows of double bunk beds. You learned quickly to get along with others and to depend on others.” Successful completion of basic training required teamwork, Private Gates discovered. The eight weeks of training were not difficult for the future Sergeant Major of the Army, which he attributed to the way his parents raised him and the challenges associated with farm life.

The basic training cadre consisted of platoon sergeants rather than drill sergeants. The only distinctive part of their uniform was a helmet liner—there were no special patches, badges, or hats in those days. The cadre presented basic military subjects, such as physical training, drill and ceremonies, and proper fit and wear of the uniforms. Committee group instructors taught the more technical skills, including marksmanship.

In basic training the day began at 0430, with “lights out” at 2200 hours. Gates remembered many of his fellow trainees working late in the latrine and under the fire lights. Training continued on the weekends with Saturday inspections and makeup training on both Saturday and Sunday. Trainees also were required to attend church services. Physical training consisted of the “daily dozen” standard exercises including the push-up, sit-up, and side straddle hop. Drill and ceremonies instruction began with the trainees learning to stand at attention and parade rest, how, when, and whom to salute, and then progressed to marching drills in formation under arms.

Daily inspections were made of the trainees’ lockers, living area, and equipment. Gates and his fellow trainees had to buy a “display for footlockers. The display had to have specific items, with specific name brands.” They used the display items only for inspections. The experience left Gates with a strong distaste for discipline without purpose, a feeling which would influence him throughout his career. Like the instruction in drill and ceremonies, inspections were progressive: the individual, his area, his equipment, the barracks, and the company area. Except during inspections, Gates did not see the company commander or the first sergeant, although the executive officer spent a great deal of time with the troops.

During basic training in the 1950s, trainees qualified with the .30-caliber M1

rifle. They also underwent extensive chemical-biological-radiological (CBR) training, including a gas chamber exercise. Training was "realistic" according to Gates. The infiltration course, with live explosives, overhead machine gun fire, and barbed wire, gave the recruits a convincing, memorable experience.

Plenty of food was available although the trainees had to run into the mess hall and eat quickly. The food was different from the meals served today. Pork, beans, and potatoes were frequent staples, while in the field the trainees ate combat rations, which provided a constant topic for discussion. "You were not allowed to waste any food," Gates remembered. The old rule "Take all you want, eat all you take!" definitely applied to the trainees. During the sixth week of basic training the trainees gained post privileges, which meant they could go to the post exchange and other on-post facilities. "The most important thing earned at the completion of basic training is a title. You enter basic training as a young civilian and leave as a member of a select group, with the title of 'soldier.' And, like privileges, your title had to be earned."

After basic training, Private Gates remained at Fort Jackson and reported for eight weeks of infantry AIT. He learned to use the Browning automatic rifle, the 3.5-mm. rocket launcher, the 106-mm. recoilless rifle, the 81-mm. mortar, and the .30-caliber machine gun. The advanced trainees also learned about mines and land navigation as well as squad-level tactics and live-fire exercises, developing in the process a sense of team spirit. "We all had something in common, we were aspiring to become infantrymen." Again, committee group instructors conducted most of the training.

Private Gates graduated from AIT in December 1958. He then shipped out to Fort Dix, New Jersey, en route to Germany to join the 3d Battle Group, 6th Infantry, in

Berlin. It took fourteen days for Gates to reach Germany by ship, a voyage that seemed an eternity because he was on KP duty every day.

One of Gates' first special assignments in Berlin was standing guard at Spandau Prison, where Nazi war criminals including Rudolf Hess and Albert Speer were still confined. Forces from the four victorious powers of World War II—the United States, Great Britain, France, and the Soviet Union—provided the prison guard detachments which rotated quarterly.

At that time Berlin, was the center of world tensions. Gates and his fellow soldiers toured East Berlin, but there was a "sense of possible confrontation . . . a definite separation of the two sides." When Soviet troops delayed an American military convoy at "Checkpoint Charlie" along the border, "the West Berlin Commander rolled out our one company of tanks, and threatened to fire on the Soviets," Gates recalled. In later years, he also remembered how he and his fellow soldiers would sometimes have more friendly encounters with their Soviet counterparts, leaving them wondering how it all would end. Most of the training focused on urban fighting since they "fully intended to defend a part of the city."

While stationed in Berlin, Gates served as a sniper, senior rifleman, and fire team leader. Periodically, his unit would travel to the training areas in West Germany, such as Hohenfels, Grafenwoehr, or Wildflecken, for infantry tactical training. In Berlin, they spent a great deal of time preparing for parades. Gates remembered the annual Armed Forces Day parade in particular. "We rehearsed for the parade a hundred times. We were supposed to impress the Soviets, and we did."

While there, Gates became a specialist, fourth class, and attended a local NCO academy, which focused on leadership principles and the methods of presenting physical train-



Gates with his jump equipment.

ing, writing lesson plans, conducting dismounted drill, and presenting classes. The academy also featured map reading, which would grow in importance as the Vietnam War heated up. All things considered, however, Specialist Gates felt that the academy did not focus on “real soldiering.” He thought “too much time and effort was devoted to polishing floors and shining pipes.”

In comparison, the Third Army NCO Academy at Fort Jackson offered more

meaningful classes and “hands-on” instruction. “As student platoon sergeants, we had to inspect our barracks, write operation orders, conduct peer counseling, and prepare for and conduct training sessions. We did not waste time shining pipes.” Gates proved to be an apt student and was selected as the Distinguished Honor Graduate of his class. As a sergeant, Gates learned to appreciate the academies as “an opportunity to see and talk to NCOs from the rest of the Army.” Gates also made progress in his civilian education. On the advice of his platoon sergeant, during his first enlistment he successfully passed the General Educational Development (GED) tests. “If you want to get anywhere in the Army, you must have a high school diploma,” he was told.

At the end of his three-year enlistment, Gates left the Army and returned to his home town. He resumed working for the Ford dealer but soon missed the Army. He had little in common with his old friends, many of whom had married or left the area. Shortly after his release from active duty, Gates reenlisted in the Army. “I made up my mind to go ‘all the way’ to be the best I could [and] to make the Army a career.” Part of that resolve came from the opportunity to select airborne duty at Fort Campbell, Kentucky, for his next assignment. Gates appreciated the challenge and the additional “jump pay” he would earn.

In the early 1960s airborne volunteers went directly to airborne units, each of which conducted its own jump school. However, until the new recruits became jump qualified, they had to live apart from the rest of the unit to some extent. Nevertheless, assigned to the “Rakkasans” of the 187th Infantry, Specialist Gates quickly became part of the 101st Airborne Division. After a week of attending a pre-airborne school, which focused on intensive physical training, he entered the division jump school. Airborne school at Fort Campbell was similar to the training at



Fort Benning today except that Fort Campbell did not have a 250-foot tower. Each airborne recruit had to make five qualifying jumps from C-119 airplanes. Within a month Gates received his jump wings.

Duty in the 101st Airborne Division left an “everlasting impression” on Gates. He particularly remembered the senior noncommissioned officers whose knowledge, experience, and judgment he came to respect highly. Many had served in World War II and Korea. The senior sergeants of the 101st Airborne conducted tough, realistic training which made their soldiers physically and mentally sharp. As Gates later pointed out, the soldiers who wanted to make a career of the Army had to take advantage of the available opportunities. “When the chance to attend Jumpmaster School surfaced, you had to go. The same applied with the Third Army NCO Academy and Ranger School.” Gates also attended the Aerial Delivery, Air Transportability, and CBR Schools while at Fort Campbell.

Gates remembers the airborne sergeants as colorful characters. Although the division had draftees in the ranks, all had volunteered for airborne duty. “Sergeants would rotate to airborne units in Okinawa and Germany, but eventually return to Fort Campbell.” As a result, the NCOs were well known to “Screaming Eagle” soldiers.

Soldiers of the 101st Airborne Division developed a strong unit cohesiveness as a result of their shared danger and close acquaintance. Unit cohesiveness was important to the division which served as part of a quick-strike reaction force. During the domestic disturbances of the early 1960s, the 101st Airborne Division was deployed to several trouble spots within the United States. For example, when James Meredith, an African-American, enrolled at the University of Mississippi, Gates’ unit provided security.

In addition, elite troops like the 101st Airborne were beginning to take counterinsurgency training in the early 1960s. To hone operational readiness, Gates trained at Natchez Trace in Tennessee, in the swamps of Florida, and in the Monongahela River valley of West Virginia. By the time he left Fort Campbell, he had made nearly seventy jumps and earned his “Master Wings.” Before his career was over, he would tally almost 300 jumps.

As part of his professional development, Sergeant Gates attended the rigorous Ranger course. At the time, the 101st Airborne Division required its Ranger school candidates to attend a two-week Recondo school, where they “were kept in a total state of stress.” However, the discipline, patrolling, mountaineering, and survival training prepared the men for the more intense Ranger school. “The men who passed the division Recondo course were those who could keep putting the left foot in front of the right, continue to go, and react under the stressful situation.” The three-mile “Recondo march,” with full packs, was “the fastest and toughest damn march of my entire career. Only eight out of a class of twenty completed the march and only eight passed the course.”

Ranger school was more of the same, with an even greater emphasis on teamwork. There the Ranger students learned to “put it all together.” They learned to make terrain models, formulate operation orders, coordinate support, and lead patrols in difficult situations over tough terrain. Ranger training took Gates to the Everglades of Florida and the mountainous region around Dahlonega, Georgia. There he learned a variety of skills, from operating small boats to mountaineering. Gates’ tenacity paid off at the completion of Ranger school. Once again, he was selected as the class Distinguished Honor Graduate.

In 1961 Sergeant Gates returned to the 101st Airborne Division Recondo School on temporary duty. During the summer months his duties included training cadets at Camp Buckner, West Point, New York. These experiences later paid significant dividends during his two tours in Vietnam, the first from 1966–67 and the second in 1969–70. Both times he went overseas as an individual replacement.

Gates' first tour in Vietnam began at Fort Campbell, where he had earned a promotion to staff sergeant. The 1st Brigade of the 101st Airborne Division had deployed to the Central Highlands of Vietnam near Pleiku. When Gates reported to Company B, 2d Battalion, 502d Infantry, 1st Brigade, he received a week of training at its Phan Rang base camp (south of Nha Trang, along the coast). From there he went to the field as a rifle squad leader. The 1st Brigade, 101st Airborne Division, was the reaction force for the I Field Force, covering the entire Central Highlands. Gates spent his first tour in Vietnam entirely in the field, carrying out search-and-destroy missions. "We primarily operated as a platoon. However, every few weeks we would form a company perimeter for resupply." The 502d made only one jump, an administrative one, during his first tour in Vietnam.

Staff Sergeant Gates soon got his first taste of live combat, the "most dynamic experience that can happen to a soldier. Leading young Americans into the rigors of front-line combat is an honor—but it is not a pleasant nor glorious experience." When the 95th Regiment of the North Vietnamese Army (NVA) attacked a Special Forces camp at Dak To, Gates' unit rushed to the scene. "There was so much to do, we did not have time to think about our situation." He and his men simply fought as they had trained.

Morale was outstanding throughout his tour. The soldiers of the 502d Infantry were

"tough, well trained, and highly disciplined. They had a job to do and, by God, they did it well." Midway through his tour, Gates was wounded while leading his squad during an assault on an enemy base camp. He completed his first year of combat as a platoon sergeant and was on the promotion list for sergeant, first class.

Problems would come later. Looking back from his perspective of nearly twenty-eight years, Gates judged that "the rapid rotation of leaders; the use of quickly trained and promoted NCOs without combat experience; our society's perception of the war; and the prevalence of drugs all took their toll on our Army in Vietnam."

In 1969, when duty called Gates to Southeast Asia a second time, he was serving with the Ranger Training Command at Fort Benning, Georgia. Then a platoon sergeant, Sergeant First Class Gates reported to Company K of the 75th Infantry, the Ranger element of the 4th Infantry Division. As part of the I Field Force, Company K was based at Pleiku and patrolled the division's area of operations along the Cambodian-Laotian border. "Our job was to detect the enemy, report information, and provide continuous surveillance and reconnaissance." While there, he served as operations sergeant, first sergeant, and platoon sergeant.

Two operations during Gates' second tour in Vietnam stood out. During the first, six Ranger teams (five men per team) from Gates' platoon went into the mountains of Pleiku. Their mission was to place surveillance on a suspected NVA infiltration route into the division's area of operations. The Rangers provided critical information about enemy movements which prevented a surprise attack on the division's base camp at Pleiku. "We Rangers did not get much publicity, but we did a fine job." The second operation, an area ambush between Pleiku and An Khe, resulted in the capture of a high-ranking

North Vietnamese officer. Years later, Gates recalled with pride his respect and admiration for his Rangers: "They were our finest. . . . We did not lose the war over there . . . our soldiers won every battle—every encounter with the enemy. We should hold our heads high—because we did our duty."

Between his tours in Vietnam, 1967–69, Sergeant First Class Gates served as an instructor in the Ranger Department at Fort Benning. His responsibilities included teaching basic subjects like hand-to-hand combat, bayonet training, land navigation, physical training, forced marches, and basic patrolling techniques. He was the principal instructor for bayonet training and assistant principal instructor for land navigation.

While he was with the Ranger Department, Gates became the first American to attend the British Army Tactics School in south Wales. His attendance at the course paved the way for a future student exchange program. He also found time to complete his precommission correspondence course and instructor training course, in addition to serving as the Webelow leader for a local Cub Scout troop.

In 1970 Sergeant First Class Gates was posted to Germany directly from his second tour in Vietnam. There he served three years with the 2d Battalion, 54th Infantry, 4th Armored Division, later redesignated the 1st Armored Division. Gates served as the S–2 (intelligence) officer, since there was a shortage of commissioned officers, and as battalion operations NCO. He had fond memories of that tour. The quarters were among the best he ever had, and his family accompanied him. He also took advantage of professional development opportunities by taking courses in combat intelligence, personnel, and physical security.

Upon his return from Germany in 1973, Gates reported to the Mountain Ranger Camp in the national forest at

Dahlonaga, Georgia. There he served as chief instructor of the patrolling committee, supervising instruction in patrolling and aggressor operations. He greatly admired the local residents, calling them "some of the finest people" he had ever met.

As an instructor, Gates accompanied extended patrols, complete with jumps into the cold winter weather and rugged terrain. While at the Mountain Ranger Camp, he also attended the Advanced Noncommissioned Officer Course at Fort Benning and graduated as the Distinguished Honor Graduate of his class.

In 1974 Master Sergeant Gates returned to Fort Benning as first sergeant of the 3d Ranger Company. After a year, he moved to the Basic Noncommissioned Officer Course, also at Fort Benning, as the enlisted course commander. His work there included additional duty responsibilities, night college courses, and community support activities.

First Sergeant Gates already knew that he would need an associate degree to maximize his career opportunities. Later, while attending the Sergeants Major Academy, he took additional courses at the Community College of El Paso. After he graduated from the academy, he continued his education at the University of Maryland, majoring in management.

As a master sergeant, Gates attended the Sergeants Major Academy and graduated in January 1977. He regarded the academy experience as unique, since he was responsible only for himself and his family. The academy introduced its students to small group instruction, a new idea in the Army. Gates particularly enjoyed associating closely with a wide variety of top NCO students, calling it a time to "see, hear, and experience working with NCOs from our Total Army." The academy emphasized the unique role of the noncommissioned officer as a leader who



had to "get weapons to fire, equipment to work, soldiers properly trained, enforce standards and discipline, and take care of soldiers and families."

The academy was also family oriented. Many of the spouses developed leadership skills through peer instruction, work in family support centers, and volunteer work. Always a family man, Gates gained a new appreciation for the idea that "the more we get the spouses and families involved, the healthier the Army becomes." He saw more clearly that the work of spouses was vital to the preparation of soldiers for deployment. During contingency operations overseas, the spouses of senior soldiers increasingly gave valuable assistance to soldiers' families, often providing the working staff at family support facilities and operating family communications centers.

After graduation, Master Sergeant Gates reported to the 1st Ranger Battalion at Fort Stewart, Georgia. There he served as first sergeant of Company A (Ranger), 75th Infantry. He spent most of his time training in the field and preparing for emergency deployments. Tough, realistic training took the men of the 75th Infantry to faraway places such as Panama, Alaska, and the Nevada desert. A typical practice emergency deployment mission would be planned and executed within twenty-four hours. Such a mission would include a lengthy flight, with in-flight rigging, a night jump, mission accomplishment, and return to home base. The men of the 75th Infantry were the "best soldiers in the world," men of exceptionally high physical, mental, and emotional standards reflected in their total commitment to accomplishing their mission. Many of the officers and noncommissioned officers who served in the 75th Infantry went on to serve with distinction at higher levels of responsibility in the Army. Many were promoted to general officer and command sergeant major.

Gates received his promotion to sergeant major in 1978. Shortly afterward he began a two-year assignment with the Army ROTC staff at the Virginia Military Institute (VMI). It was a unique experience for Sergeant Major Gates, the chief instructor. The institute had a Ranger platoon and a tank platoon equipped with M48 tanks. Sergeant Major Gates accompanied the cadets during summer training at Fort Bragg, North Carolina. Service at VMI was "not the real Army," however, and Gates longed for an assignment with the soldiers he loved. He received his promotion to command sergeant major in 1979 while serving at VMI.

In 1980 Sergeant Major Gates reported to the 2d Battalion, 50th Infantry, 2d Armored Division (Forward), Garlstadt, Germany. He served as battalion sergeant major and later as the sergeant major of the division. There he found good soldier support facilities and "the best soldier and family housing in all of Europe."

The missions of the 2d Armored Division (Forward) included preparing for the deployment of the rest of the division from Fort Hood, Texas, and preparing to fight as a separate brigade working with NATO, British, and German units and commands. Division personnel also assisted with the prepositioning of materiel in southern Germany. However, Sergeant Major Gates' "time was almost totally occupied training soldiers." Elements of the division rotated through the Hohenfels training site, at one point remaining there nearly ninety days. They also trained in Denmark and Belgium and participated in the annual REFORGER exercises.<sup>1</sup>

After serving three years in the brigade, Gates was selected as the 3d Infantry Division's command sergeant major, which

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1. Return of Forces to Germany, large-scale military exercises intended to demonstrate the capability to reinforce NATO with forces based in the continental United States.

required another family move to Wuerzburg, Germany. While assigned to the 3d Infantry Division, Sergeant Major Gates spearheaded the effort to refurbish the NCO academy. With the introduction of extremely complicated equipment such as the Abrams tank, the Bradley fighting vehicle, and tactical artillery fire control, NCO education and capabilities took on new importance, while the widespread introduction of computers throughout the division had the same effect. Realizing the need for unit-duty-performance-oriented NCO training, Gates assisted his commander in producing an NCO development program that would later become the Army's model.

From Germany, Gates returned to the Sergeants Major Academy in 1984. As the school's command sergeant major, he worked closely with its commandant, Col. Fitzhugh H. Chandler, Jr. Although his tour at the academy lasted less than a year, Gates thought he had accomplished much during his brief tenure, which gave him "a unique opportunity for input into the NCO training policies of our Total Army." Among his projects at the academy was the further development of the common core subjects for the basic and advanced courses, planning for the NCO Battle Staff Course, and construction of the new academic building. Although Sergeant Major Gates attempted to keep his travel time to a minimum, he visited both the Command and General Staff College at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, and the Army War College at Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania, to explain the academy's programs and the role of command sergeants major in supporting and assisting commanders.

In addition, Sergeant Major Gates worked through the Fort Bliss chain of command to have constructed a new gym and additional housing for the academy students. Foreign students also began to attend the academy during this period, with NCOs from



CSM Gates in the 2d Armored Division  
(Forward) in Germany.

the armed forces of the Philippines, Italy, and Great Britain coming to the academy either as students or as supplementary staff.

Sergeant Major Gates' selection as command sergeant major of Eighth Army and U.S. Forces, Korea, came in May 1985. Accompanied by his family, he saw firsthand the problems facing the American forces there. From the command headquarters at Yong Son, Gates worked to improve the training of both U.S. and Korean forces. During his tenure, the Republic of Korea

established an NCO academy system and began sending noncommissioned officers to the United States for training. In addition, Gates assisted in the development of the new Noncommissioned Officer Evaluation Report and spearheaded the needed renovations of the Eighth Army NCO Academy.

The presence of unsponsored family members caused a major headache for the American forces in Korea. In addition to the financial burdens they imposed on the soldiers, Gates found that available quarters and schools were often inadequate, with some U.S. troops still living in unheated Quonset huts. As the command sergeant major, Gates worked hard to have more soldier barracks and recreation facilities built. He established additional soldier programs throughout the command, such as the Soldier of the Quarter program, supported by the Association of the United States Army. Gates' wife Margaret worked with other spouses and the chain of command to improve conditions at a local orphanage. Despite the sometimes harsh living conditions, "the soldiers' morale and *esprit de corps* were outstanding."

Near the end of his tour in Korea, Sergeant Major Gates requested reassignment to the Joint Readiness Training Center (JRTC) at Fort Chaffee, Arkansas. Instead, he found that he was one of thirty candidates for the position of Sergeant Major of the Army. With a selection board consisting of a lieutenant general, four major generals, and incumbent SMA Glen Morrell, the field narrowed quickly.

The board asked Gates a wide variety of questions about Army priorities and policy issues such as the role of women in the Army. They gave particular concern to family issues and asked for his opinion about the role of his wife. True to his usual course, Sergeant Major Gates told the selection board that he thought the top priority of the

Army should be training. "That means everybody trained to fight and win, regardless of MOS or station assignment." When they asked Gates what he thought his duties would be, he replied, "I think the Sergeant Major of the Army's job is to support and keep the Chief of Staff informed about the enlisted concerns in the Army, and let him know how soldiers are training and living at the canteen-cup level." The Chief of Staff, General Carl E. Vuono, agreed with Gates and endorsed his selection as Sergeant Major of the Army four days later.

The next four years proved busy for the new Sergeant Major of the Army. As Gates accepted the demands of office calls by the Secretary of the Army and other high-level officials, serving on the general staff, and attending hundreds of meetings and functions, he found that his "greatest challenge" was keeping in touch with unit soldiers and providing soldier feedback to General Vuono and the Army staff.

Visiting Army installations throughout the world was one way of taking the Army's pulse. As Sergeant Major of the Army, Gates visited sites ranging from small radio communications stations in Germany to troop elements stationed in remote Pacific islands. He attempted to visit every division and major command annually as well as to address every class at the Sergeants Major Academy. He also visited every NATO REFORGER exercise, all TEAM SPIRIT maneuvers in Korea, and made many trips to the NTC, JRTC, and reserve training sites. In addition, Gates participated in the observance of the forty-fifth anniversary of the D-day invasion and often traveled with the Chief of Staff. He later estimated that he spent only about 20 percent of his time in his Pentagon office.

During his tenure as Sergeant Major of the Army, Gates served on twenty-seven boards and commissions ranging from the





SMA Gates (top right) and Chief of Staff Carl E. Vuono (top, second from right) with troops in the field.

Army and Air Force Exchange Service board of directors to the Army Clothing and Equipment Board. He testified annually before three congressional committees and made countless media releases, both live and written. On one occasion, President George Bush invited Sergeant Major of the Army and

Mrs. Gates to attend a reception honoring the queen of Denmark at the White House.

The wife of the Sergeant Major of the Army had an important role to play in her husband's position. Gates had married the former Margaret Wilson on 13 June 1964. A native of Pontotoc, Mississippi, she had



General Vuono and SMA Gates visit with young soldier during their trip to the former Soviet Union.

grown up in a farm family similar to her husband's. The couple began their married life in a trailer, experienced the full range of military quarters, and once had to live in a twenty-foot camper for nearly six months. Their two daughters, Melissa and Laura, also endured their father's long separations and abrupt transfers and sometimes had to take intercontinental flights to attend school. While Sergeant Major Gates believed such experiences built self-confidence in his family, they also made him acutely aware of the strains that the families of soldiers faced. "We always tried to leave things better than . . . when we arrived [for] the people who replaced us."

Margaret Gates worked hard as an "extension" of her husband's office. Since the number of families in the Army had vastly increased since 1958, she recognized early on the importance of family support. As she had in Germany, Korea, and the United States, Mrs. Gates continued working to improve child care centers, hospitals, support centers, and schools for military personnel.

While Bill Gates was Sergeant Major of the Army, world events moved rapidly. During his term of office the Berlin Wall came down and the Communist governments of Eastern Europe collapsed. In the fall of 1989, Gates had accompanied the Chief of

Staff on a visit to the former Soviet Union. He toured the Kremlin, several major cities, and military training sites. He watched as Russian officers, using American computers, war-gamed the assault on Western Europe. As he observed the Russian Army, however, Gates was not always impressed: "I don't think they fully understand why our Army has a noncommissioned officer corps."

The visit to Russia abruptly ended when the Chief of Staff returned to Washington to help plan for Operation JUST CAUSE in Panama. Gates spent Christmas 1989 with the troops in Panama. "The soldiers who were required to fight and win Operation JUST CAUSE were highly trained, disciplined, and motivated to do what was right, and they did a great job." His foreign travel with the Chief of Staff also included a tour of the Middle East where they visited Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Israel, and U.S. troops in the Sinai Desert. During Operations DESERT SHIELD and DESERT STORM, Gates visited Southwest Asia twice and spent Christmas 1990 with the troops in Saudi Arabia. With information gathered on those trips, he helped solve problems concerning replacement centers, post exchange services, and soldier mail.

Despite the extensive travel Gates undertook as Sergeant Major of the Army, he improved training, enhanced the status of the NCO, and improved the quality of life for soldiers. As a member of the Uniform Board, he influenced more than 150 minor uniform changes including the introduction of desert boots, new fabrics, and better styling—seemingly minor items that were often exceedingly important to average soldiers whose uniform was such an integral part of daily life. Also introduced during Gates' tenure was the Installation of Excellence program, designed to encourage soldiers to help themselves by making facility improvements that otherwise would not

have been possible. His concern for single soldiers caused the establishment of the Better Opportunities for Single Soldiers (BOSS) program as well.

To Gates, however, training remained the Army's critical issue. "Making training the number one priority in the Army had a lot to do with bringing the Army together, and caused us to focus on our wartime tasks." The NCO Battle Staff Course, a new NCO Evaluation Report, and the self-development test—a replacement for the Skill Qualification Test—were firmly established during Gates' tenure. Working closely with General Vuono, Gates assisted with the success of the "Year of Training" followed by the "Year of the NCO." Sergeant Major Gates believed that a strong NCO corps was critical for a strong Army.

He regarded with pride the many accomplishments made during his term of office, including the first NCO historical volume and the introduction of Army Field Manual 21-101, defining the training role of the noncommissioned officer. He also admired General Vuono and the general's support for NCO training. With Vuono's total support, Gates launched the *NCO Journal* as an official publication. At the same time, he recognized that "the time had come to build the Army of the future, and make a smaller, more deployable, more lethal, better trained, and equipped Army." To that end, Gates closely followed the introduction of new technology, training techniques, the changing roles of women, the assurance of equal opportunity, and the systematic reduction in force. He called for additional efforts to assist soldiers leaving the Army prior to their normal retirement. His efforts and concern resulted in the establishment of the Army Career and Alumni Program.

Near the end of Gates' tenure, he was asked to comment about his most difficult



and most rewarding experiences: "My most difficult experiences were seeing our great soldiers committed to combat . . . visiting our wounded and injured in medical facilities . . . and attending memorial services for our fallen soldiers . . . seeing the pride on the faces of our soldiers returning safely home from war in Panama and the Middle East . . . and seeing my wife survive heart surgery were, beyond a doubt, my most pleasant experiences."

Sergeant Major of the Army Julius W. Gates retired with an impressive ceremony at Fort Myer on 30 June 1991. He used even that opportunity to enhance the prestige of noncommissioned officers. As had several of

his predecessors, he saw to it that the ceremony, with the Chief of Staff and other dignitaries attending, was carried out entirely by the noncommissioned officers of the Old Guard. True to his form of placing soldiers before himself and showing pride, affection, and admiration for soldiers who serve in the ranks, Gates remarked during his retirement address that he hoped the audience had come to see examples of the best trained, best equipped, best led, and best soldiers in the world instead of to see an old soldier retire from the Army. "On the field in front of you are your nation's finest, your soldiers. Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to serve in the ranks with them."

## Assignments

1958-61	Rifleman, 3d Battle Group, 6th Infantry, Berlin, Germany (break in service)
1961-66	Rifle Squad Leader, 187th Infantry, 101st Airborne Division, Fort Campbell, Kentucky
1966-67	Rifle Squad Leader, Company K, 2d Battalion, 502d Infantry, 101st Airborne Division, Vietnam
1967-68	Platoon Sergeant, Instructor, Ranger Training Command, Fort Benning, Georgia
1969-70	Operations Sergeant, Platoon Sergeant, First Sergeant, Company K, 75th Infantry, 4th Infantry Division, Vietnam
1970-73	Battalion Intelligence Officer and Battalion Operations Sergeant, 2d Battalion, 54th Infantry, 1st Armored Division, Germany
1974-76	Senior Instructor, Chief Instructor, Ranger Department; First Sergeant, 3d Ranger Company; Enlisted Company Commander, Basic NCO Course, Fort Benning
1976-77	Student, Sergeants Major Academy, Fort Bliss, Texas
1977-78	First Sergeant, Company A, 1st Ranger Battalion, 5th Infantry, Fort Stewart, Georgia
1978-80	Chief Instructor, ROTC detachment, Virginia Military Institute, Lexington, Virginia
1980-84	Command Sergeant Major, 2d Battalion, 50th Infantry, 2d Armored Division (Forward), Garlstadt, Germany
1984-85	Command Sergeant Major, U.S. Army Sergeants Major Academy, Fort Bliss
1985-87	Command Sergeant Major, U.S. Forces Korea/Eighth U.S. Army, Yong Son, Korea
1987-91	Sergeant Major of the Army

## Selected Decorations and Awards

Distinguished Service Medal  
 Defense Superior Service Medal  
 Legion of Merit  
 Bronze Star Medal with V Device and three Oak Leaf Clusters  
 Purple Heart  
 Meritorious Service Medal with four Oak Leaf Clusters  
 Air Medal  
 Army Commendation Medal with three Oak Leaf Clusters  
 Army Achievement Medal  
 Good Conduct Medal  
 Army of Occupation Medal  
 American Defense Service Medal  
 Vietnam Service Medal  
 NCO Professional Development Ribbon  
 Army Service Ribbon  
 Overseas Service Ribbon  
 Republic of Vietnam Campaign Medal  
 Combat Infantryman Badge





## Richard A. Kidd

**R**ichard A. Kidd, the second of five children, was born in Morehead, Kentucky, on 24 June 1943 into a military family. His father, Samuel D. Kidd, had served in the infantry in World War II when his National Guard unit was called to federal service. Shortly after leaving the Army at the end of the war, Kidd's father returned to active service in the administrative field and, after serving over twenty-eight years, retired as a chief warrant officer. As an Army family member, Kidd lived at posts in many different places throughout the United States as well as Nuremberg, Wuerzburg, and Schweinfurt in Germany.

Although his father never stressed the military as a potential career for his children, Kidd remembers his parents teaching him things that were instrumental to his later success in the Army, especially discipline, a belief in God, and frankness and honesty. While growing up at home, he also learned the importance of committing to do a job properly. "My parents were firm believers in 'if it's worth doing, it's worth doing well.'"

Kidd was an avid athlete. Although he was good enough to be on the school basketball, baseball, and wrestling teams and even boxed in Golden Glove competitions for a short period, he most enjoyed the challenge of playing football. As both a running back and a defensive linebacker, he learned from football, above all the other sports he knew, the value of teamwork. "As a running back, especially, you learn that you don't go anywhere without the rest of the team." This lesson would pay great dividends when he traded in his football jersey for Army fatigues.

As a student, Kidd's favorite subject was mathematics. He also found history a fascinating field of study when taught by teachers who made the subject "come alive." Although he did not go on to earn a college degree immediately after attending high school, Kidd accumulated college credits at various times throughout his later years and is currently on the verge of obtaining a bachelor's degree in business administration.

Kidd was no stranger to hard work. In addition to chores at home, his studies, and

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This section is based on interviews given by SMA Richard A. Kidd to Maj. Mark F. Gillespie, 1 September 1994, and to Maj. Glen R. Hawkins, 23 February 1993, in the Pentagon, Washington, D.C.; and on "Straight from the Top," an interview with SMA Kidd by SFC Mark Kalinoski in *Soldiers* 48 (June 1993): 21-23.



Kidd in basic training, Fort Benning, Georgia, 1962.

athletic activities during the school year, he ran a thriving paper route and worked at the post swimming pool and bowling alley during summer vacations. The future SMA also achieved considerable acclaim working at the local Army post exchange as one of its youngest branch managers and even considered a career with the AAFES. However, with the draft a reality in the early 1960s, he wanted to have his military service obligation completely finished to ensure upward mobility. He therefore chose to join the Army for a

three-year enlistment, which at the time would fulfill his entire military obligation.

With the full intention of staying in uniform for only three years, Kidd left his home in Arlington, Virginia, and was sworn into active service at Fort Holabird, Maryland, on 30 March 1962. As a private, he attended basic training at Fort Gordon, Georgia, and was shocked at two things about the Army—how much he liked the challenge and how little privacy was afforded to the basic trainees. Kidd's upbringing helped him to make an almost natural adjustment to military life, such as saying "yes, sir" and "no, sir," keeping physically fit, and maintaining a short haircut, "but even all my playing sports in high school didn't prepare me for the lack of privacy I encountered in basic training such as rows of toilets in the open without stalls. We've really come a long way since then with respect to improving the living conditions and privacy for soldiers."

The cadre at Fort Gordon quickly noticed substantial leadership potential in the new private. He rapidly gained positions of responsibility within his platoon and was asked to take the qualifying tests for Officer Candidate School (OCS). Although he passed the tests and the cadre strongly recommended him for OCS, Kidd declined the offer because it incurred an obligation exceeding three years.

The professionalism of the drill sergeants Kidd encountered in basic training made a lasting impression on him. "They were good role models with positive attitudes and gave plenty of encouragement." The training "was realistic, well presented, and kept you challenged." Although he never had to do KP duty as a punishment during basic training, Kidd recalled having to do his fair share of peeling potatoes, washing dishes, serving food, and so forth, from dawn to dusk. "It was a learning experience that was very humbling. There are times I think it

ought to be brought back as something that brings you into total touch with reality.”

Upon enlisting, Kidd had wanted to be in the Special Forces. However, since one had to be at least a sergeant to join the Green Berets, he sought airborne and infantry training as these seemed the most challenging alternatives. Because he was only assured of one choice, he opted for airborne training, on the assumption that infantry would be easier to obtain later. That assumption proved wrong when Kidd was slated to become a radio repairman instead of a combat infantryman when he moved to Fort Benning, Georgia, in June 1962 for AIT. After arriving at Fort Benning, he requested to talk to his new company commander about transferring into infantry training. The company commander told him it was indeed possible, but that he would have to wait a few months until a slot opened. When Kidd asked what he would be doing in the meantime, he learned he would “pull KP and other details.” Thereupon he decided it was better to be a radio repairman “communicator.” In retrospect, Kidd found his decision to have been a good one because the Army expects its combat units to be able to “move, shoot, and communicate.” His early training in the communications field enabled him to thoroughly understand the last of those key tasks.

After AIT, airborne school proved especially challenging for Kidd because of his fear of heights. “I wanted to pit myself against the toughest challenges and push to overcome those things that I considered weaknesses.” Although he dreaded heights, he learned to control his fear. Later in his career, he even took military free-fall training, commonly referred to as HALO, as well as mountain climbing.

Kidd never informed his parents about his airborne training until after he had completed four of the five jumps required to qualify as a military parachutist. He enjoys telling

that when he at last called home to relate his airborne experiences, his mother, Mona P. Kidd, nearly fainted and had to sit down. Kidd had injured his leg on the fourth jump but wanted to graduate with his buddies so badly that he made his fifth jump on the bad leg. After graduation, he was hospitalized.

In November 1962, after leaving the hospital, Kidd went to his first troop assignment in Mainz, Germany, as a radio maintenance specialist in the 504th Airborne, “Devils in Baggy Pants,” the airborne element of the 8th Infantry Division. The previous month had seen Cold War tensions escalate to the brink of open conflict during the Cuban missile crisis, and units stationed in Germany were on constant alert.

Kidd’s first day with the 8th Infantry Division provided him with a valuable lesson on soldier morale. Upon arriving at the front gate of the post wearing the hard-earned hallmarks of airborne soldiers—glider patches on their garrison caps and trousers bloused over jump boots—he and two other airborne-qualified soldiers were shocked and dismayed at being informed of the division commander’s policy forbidding such wear. Kidd’s spirits, along with those of his fellow paratroopers, were soon lifted when the new division commander flew down to Mainz one morning and announced to the assembled troops that henceforth airborne soldiers could wear their distinctive patches and jump boots. He endeared himself even further with the enlisted men by ordering all troops to be dismissed for the rest of the day, much to the consternation of the company commanders and first sergeants.

Kidd rapidly advanced through various positions in the communications field while stationed at Mainz and ended his European tour in December 1965 as a sergeant and the chief of radio maintenance for his battalion. During his assignment in Germany he encountered the first leader who would set





Kidd (right), as a young soldier, ready to jump in Germany, 1963.

him on the path to an Army career spanning more than thirty-three years. Sgt. Leo Santerre, a young platoon sergeant, epitomized the successful NCO. He looked sharp and was competent, confident, caring, physically fit, mentally alert, morally straight, and dedicated.

While still stationed in Germany, Kidd volunteered several times for duty in Vietnam, which by then had become an active combat theater, but his requests were always denied. Instead, he was given orders to report to the 82d Airborne Division at Fort Bragg, North Carolina. During this tour of duty Kidd met his future bride, Sylvia E. J. Gooch. Her father, also a military man, was stationed in Heilbronn, Germany, where Kidd's father was stationed. They became engaged and set a marriage date for immediately upon Kidd's return from Vietnam, since he was still determined to get his orders changed.

En route to his new post, Kidd stopped at the Pentagon personnel office to find out how he could land a combat assignment in Vietnam. The personnel officer asked him which unit he preferred. Upon hearing Kidd's reply of "173d Airborne," the officer disappeared into a back room for a few minutes and returned with the news, "Sergeant, you're on your way!" Although his new orders assigned him to the 173d Airborne, by the time he actually got to a troop unit in Vietnam in January 1966, he had been diverted first to the 101st Airborne Division and finally to Company C, 2d Battalion, 5th Cavalry, a nonairborne infantry company in the 1st Cavalry Division.

Although initially requesting reassignment to the division's airborne brigade, Kidd later regarded himself fortunate for having stayed in the "Cav" and "Charlie" Company. There he met Capt. Charles H. Fry, his company commander, who became the second major force in convincing him to make the Army a career: "If you want to be part of a professional Army and you and the other good NCOs we have are willing to stick it out, you can help make a difference in the quality of tomorrow's Army."

Although assigned as the company's communications chief, Kidd longed to serve as an infantryman. Captain Fry gave him that opportunity on the condition he also fulfill his communications responsibilities. Kidd accepted, serving admirably first as a squad leader and later, after promotion to staff sergeant, as a platoon sergeant in combat. His combat tour was only briefly interrupted by a short stay in a hospital in Japan to recover from malaria and an infection caused by an only partially effective Viet Cong boobytrap.

Before Kidd finished his year of duty in Vietnam, Captain Fry recommended him for a direct commission as a first lieutenant. Although the division headquarters approved the commission, the approval arrived as Kidd

was en route to the 82d Airborne Division at Fort Bragg. Because direct commissions had to be approved and given by the division to which the soldier was assigned, the recommendation package had to be forwarded to Fort Bragg. Although the package arrived intact, a few additional prerequisites had to be fulfilled. Then, mysteriously, half of the package was lost and had to be restarted. By then, however, Kidd felt it was not meant to happen and had decided to discontinue pursuing the matter. He later acknowledged this as a stroke of luck because many of those who received direct commissions were involuntarily forced out of the service or returned to their former enlisted ranks during the massive reductions in force after the Vietnam War. Moreover, he would not have been eligible for the post of Sergeant Major of the Army since any commissioned service disqualifies one from consideration.

As planned, Kidd married Sylvia in Olympia, Washington, immediately upon his return from Vietnam in January 1967, and they started their life together as a military family. Three weeks later, they arrived at Fort Bragg, where he began working as the wire foreman in the 82d Airborne Division's 3d Battalion, 325th Infantry Regiment. But after Captain Fry inspired him to stay on active duty beyond his initial enlistment and since he had the opportunity to serve as a combat leader in Vietnam, Kidd was anxious to transfer into the Special Forces, the organization he had originally sought to join. Several months later he finally managed to break through the bureaucratic barriers and entered the rigorous Green Beret training program.

To become fully qualified in Special Forces in that era, a soldier had to pass a basic Special Forces training course and then master three of the five Special Forces military occupational specialties. Kidd's communications specialty counted as one of them.



Kidd at a temporary base camp in Pleiku, Republic of Vietnam, 1966.

With his combat experience and strong determination to overcome challenges, Kidd excelled in all phases of Special Forces training and graduated as the Distinguished Honor Graduate. He was also the Distinguished Honor Graduate of the light weapons course that qualified him for another of his three required specialties. In 1969 he attended the Operations and Intelligence course at Fort Bragg and at Fort Holabird. At Fort Bragg, the Kidds' first child, daughter Shelly, was born in June 1970. Kidd received orders to return to Vietnam in November 1970 and found himself serving there during the same period as his father.

This time, Kidd found himself working as a light weapons infantry adviser with South Vietnamese units as part of a MACV five-man mobile advisory team. He was quite surprised at how much had changed since his last tour, especially regarding the sharp increase in restrictions on how, when, and where the enemy could be confronted, which later became known as the rules of engagement.

He also perceived a deterioration in the professionalism and performance of American forces in the field during operations. In one instance, an American infantry company was assigned to cooperate with the South Vietnamese force he was advising in setting up a night ambush. Late that night, Kidd first checked the Vietnamese soldiers, who appeared alert, and then went to check on the Americans. He was appalled to find most of them asleep with the unmistakable odor of marijuana smoke wafting from their position. "We took corrective actions to ensure the safety of the force and requested no further joint operations with that particular unit." As did many soldiers who returned to Vietnam in the early 1970s for a second or third tour, Kidd recalled that during his first tour in 1966–67, the attitude of the soldiers was generally much more idealistic and drug use was virtually nonexistent.

Kidd's next station was with the U.S. Army Advisory Group, Fifth Army, at Fort Sheridan, Illinois, as the senior enlisted adviser to the Army National Guard and Army Reserve in the region. While there, he was sent to Fort Benning to attend the Advanced NCOES Course in September 1972. Kidd continued his tradition of academic excellence by being an honor graduate, missing the award of Distinguished Honor Graduate by only a fraction of a point. Upon his return from the professional development course, he continued his duties as a senior enlisted adviser. The Kidds' second child, son Ryan, was born in September 1974 in

Appleton, Wisconsin. During his tour, Kidd was also selected for promotion to master sergeant and for immediate attendance at the U.S. Army Sergeants Major Academy (USASMA) in Fort Bliss, Texas.

He attended Class 8 at USASMA in 1976–77 and first met his predecessor, SMA Bill Gates, as a fellow student. Despite his best efforts to return to Fort Bragg and the Special Forces after graduating from the Sergeants Major Academy, Kidd was given orders to Korea with a follow-on assignment to Fort Lewis, Washington. The posting to Fort Lewis after Korea came as a surprise because "I put it down as one of my preferences at the urging of my wife, Sylvia, fully expecting not to be given any of my choices."

Kidd began his tour in Korea in February 1977 and reported for duty at the 1st Battalion, 32d Infantry "Buccaneers," at Camp Howze. His new battalion commander, Lt. Col. Stephen Silvasy, appeared enthusiastic about obtaining an academy graduate and informed him to be prepared to be an intelligence sergeant, an operations sergeant, and one of his company first sergeants. When Kidd asked him which assignment to be ready for first, Silvasy replied, "All three!" In reality, Kidd started as the intelligence NCO but soon had to replace the outgoing operations NCO while still keeping the intelligence section functioning, a feat requiring considerable ingenuity.

Two months later, a first sergeant was relieved and Master Sergeant Kidd became his replacement. Kidd quickly found the cause of his predecessor's downfall: the former first sergeant had been micromanaging his platoon sergeants. This became apparent at Kidd's first meeting with the platoon sergeants to go over the weekly training and routine taskings. At first they all wanted to find out exactly how he wanted them to accomplish their missions "You're



the platoon sergeants,” Kidd replied. “If I have to tell you how to do your job, I don’t need you.” He swiftly instituted a system of issuing tasks and missions and letting the NCOs take full advantage of their experience and initiative to accomplish them—letting people do what they were trained to do.

Additional morale problems in the company stemmed from the former first sergeant’s holding the company to more restrictive rules than he himself had followed regarding Korean nationals’ visiting the camp. Moreover, the KATUSA reinforcements were not being properly integrated into the company to receive their training. Kidd announced that “the same rules applied for everybody” and set about integrating the Koreans into the company. Although the KATUSA issue was more difficult to solve, the new first sergeant’s leadership had a major part in curing the company’s ills. Soon the company was passing IG inspections and winning divisionwide sports and military skills proficiency competitions with regularity. “Teamwork gets it done every time.”

In March 1978 Kidd returned to Fort Lewis as first sergeant of the “Can Do” Combat Support Company in the 2d Battalion, 1st Infantry Regiment (“Always First”), 9th Infantry Division (“Old Reliables”), commanded by Capt. Charles Mare. Proving that even good first sergeants can make an occasional unintended mistake, Kidd started off his first morning’s PT formation almost literally on the wrong foot. He had arrived at Fort Lewis shortly after the switch had been made from wearing combat boots to tennis shoes as the required footwear for PT. Upon seeing the company in formation for the morning’s exercise in such informal footwear, he had the company return to the barracks to put on their combat boots. No one apparently had the presence of mind to inform the new first sergeant of the change; thus everyone returned to formation in com-



Kidd as first sergeant of Company B, 1st Battalion, 32d Infantry “Buccaneers,” at Camp Howze, Korea, 1977.

bat boots. The company then proceeded to do exercises and a company run in the prohibited footwear. Only later in the day did a fellow first sergeant telephone him about the new rule. Kidd’s strong leadership and experience overcame the mishap, and soon the company gained a reputation as the best in the division, the one through which distinguished visitors to the battalion, brigade, division, and even the post were regularly escorted to make a favorable impression.

While at Lewis, Kidd was selected for promotion to sergeant major and designated as a command sergeant major. Despite his background in infantry and Special Forces, he was summoned to an interview with the commander of the division’s aviation battalion, Lt. Col. Dean Owen. When it became obvious that the battalion commander was briefing on his goals and vision for the battalion rather than conducting an interview, Kidd stated that the battalion CSM should be

the most knowledgeable NCO in his unit. He protested further that he was not qualified in aviation and therefore not qualified to hold such a position. The battalion commander countered that he needed Kidd's experience and leadership skills as an NCO—the battalion was already strong in technical expertise. The division CSM ultimately encouraged Kidd to take on the challenge and he accepted the assignment.

Although he initially considered his lack of knowledge about aviation a disadvantage, Kidd later termed the job “one of the greatest learning experiences for me, especially working with warrant officers.” The vexing issues he eventually solved included getting everyone into the same uniform for formations and finding time and motivation for PT. “I wasn't very popular with a lot of them because of that.”

This was also Kidd's first assignment to a unit with female soldiers. He candidly admitted his lack of experience and his need to become more familiar with the rules that applied to them. “I discovered that all they wanted was to be treated like soldiers . . . equal, pull the same duties, etc.” One example that came to his attention concerned guard duty. Although minor to an outsider, it was important to those involved. Regulations required female soldiers to pull guard shifts in pairs based on concerns for their safety at isolated guard posts. Every so often, one of the pair was selected as the colonel's orderly—an honor bestowed on a soldier detailed to stand guard as a reward for exceptionally outstanding appearance and knowledge at the formal inspection preceding the actual posting—which usually entitled the soldier to take the day off. Even if selected, however, female soldiers had to accompany their partners to the guard post. Kidd carefully read the regulations and determined that the guard posts his soldiers manned were not isolated, since they were at the airfield directly behind

battalion headquarters. Subsequently, double posting of females ceased, and morale in the battalion improved measurably.

In November 1979, Kidd was reassigned to the 2d Battalion, 2d Infantry Regiment (“Devil's Deuce”), as the command sergeant major. Feeling more at home with the infantry, Kidd also carefully watched how others handled problems of morale and discipline. One memorable aspect of his new battalion was “court night,” when battalion-level Articles 15 were administered. The battalion commander, Lt. Col. Alan Wetzel, required all new officers and soldiers to attend the first available session after they arrived. In the first session Kidd attended, an NCO was charged with using illegal drugs. When the NCO was found guilty and sentenced to a reduction in grade, his first sergeant and the battalion sergeant major, Kidd in this instance, stood on either side of him and ripped the stripes off his uniform. “You could see everyone in the room flinch when that happened. It sure got the former sergeant's attention as well as everyone else's in attendance.” Kidd considered this just one of many reasons why the battalion was best in the division and had the least number of problems.

Kidd received orders posting him back to Germany in July 1981 as the commandant of the 1st Armored Division's NCO Academy at Katterbach. Upon arrival, Kidd was dismayed at the shabby state of the academy's facilities. It did not even have a sign in front to indicate the academy's existence. During his initial office call with the commanding general, Maj. Gen. John C. Faith, Kidd stated that he would prefer assignment with a troop unit. Learning this was not an option, Kidd gave a litany of the things wrong with the facility. The general asked him to outline the deficiencies in a formal paper. Kidd was pleased to find the new commanding general, Maj. Gen. Thomas F. Healy, who assumed

command shortly after Kidd's arrival, very interested in the NCOES and willing to order the corrective action needed. "It took three whole years to get it completely fixed. When I arrived, everyone wanted to go to the Seventh Army NCO Academy. By the time I left, after much work by a great team of soldiers, NCOs, and civilians, everyone wanted to go to the 1st Armored Division's 'Old Ironsides' Academy instead."

Sergeant Major Kidd returned to Fort Lewis in July 1984 and began a remarkable five-year progression of assignments as command sergeant major of the 4th Battalion, 23d Infantry ("Bar None"), commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Cima; the 3d Brigade ("Red Devils"), 9th Infantry Division, commanded by Col. Barry R. McCaffrey; the 9th Infantry Division, commanded by Maj. Gen. Donald S. Pihl and later Maj. Gen. John M. Shalikashvili; and finally, the I Corps ("America's Corps"), commanded by Lt. Gen. William H. Harrison and later Lt. Gen. Calvin A. H. Waller. Acting corps commander Maj. Gen. Thomas H. Tait, in concert with General Waller (who had been called away to be General H. Norman Schwarzkopf's deputy commander during Operation DESERT SHIELD/DESERT STORM), nominated Command Sergeant Major Kidd to be the Sergeant Major of the Army. Kidd found the nomination quite an honor. Although he knew he had a competitive record, he did not think he had much of a chance of being selected because he did not come from a major command as the previous Sergeants Major of the Army had and because he had never previously worked for the incoming Army Chief of Staff, General Gordon R. Sullivan. "I am glad I was wrong," Kidd later noted.

Sergeant Major Kidd traveled to Washington, D.C., in May 1991 for a personal interview by General Sullivan along with the other finalists. He was uncertain what to expect when outgoing Sergeant Major of the

Army Gates asked him to leave his hotel room and pick up the house phone in the lobby. It was General Sullivan on the line to congratulate him as the new Sergeant Major of the Army. Kidd experienced a cascade of emotions—happiness and pride at being given the great honor, sadness at leaving the I Corps and Fort Lewis which had become the place he wanted to live upon retirement, anxiety at being able to fulfill the imposing responsibilities entailed in the job, and concern about the effect on his family.

For Kidd's family, the move to Washington, D.C., was difficult. Allowing their son Ryan to remain behind was a most trying and emotional decision. Ryan was to begin his junior year at Spanaway High School just outside of Fort Lewis, and Shelly was attending college at Western Washington University. Ryan asked to be allowed to stay and finish high school with his friends as well as continue with his involvement in many school activities, programs, and sports. After they made arrangements for Ryan to finish school at Fort Lewis—under the stipulation that his 4.0 grade point average not slip—the new Sergeant Major of the Army and his wife headed east for the nation's capital. The Kidds' faith in Ryan proved well founded when he graduated two years later as valedictorian of his class with a 4.0 GPA and a write-up in the national *High School Who's Who in Sports*.

Many challenges confronted the incoming SMA. The most serious was the turbulent reduction of the Army's forces from the Cold War level to one suitable and sustainable for a new, but uncertain international environment. Finding ways to ease the hardship and pain of soldiers and their families who elected to leave the Army as a result of the massive reductions soon proved the toughest issue he had ever dealt with. As the senior representative of the enlisted force,



Kidd needed to ensure that the concerns of the soldiers, especially with respect to the method and fairness of the reduction process, had been heard and taken into account by the Army's leaders faced with this difficult, unpleasant task. Critical to his efforts in this area were the provision of adequate services to ease transitions to civilian life.

During his visits with soldiers, it quickly became apparent that soldiers hungered for information about the Army's restructuring effort and its potential effect on their careers. SMA Kidd swiftly addressed soldiers' concerns by making himself available through internal command information media, i.e., Army News Service, Soldiers Radio and Television, *Soldiers* magazine, newspapers, as well as radio and television stations at installations he visited. Taking an aggressive approach, he told the Army's story to the various external audiences through interviews with the print and electronic media. Kidd believes that whatever successes the Army has had with its restructuring effort can be directly attributed to the availability of information to soldiers and their families. He feels strongly that soldiers make better-informed decisions about their future in the Army if they have current and accurate information. An indicator of the Army leadership's success in communication was that the Army did not need an enlisted reduction-in-force during the drawdown.

The Army Chief of Staff and SMA Kidd also grappled with the steady increase in the Army's participation in operations other than combat. Despite the Army's participation in humanitarian assistance missions like PROVIDE HOPE, PROVIDE RELIEF, and PROVIDE PROMISE, Kidd believed that the Army's core mission was not changing. "We have built-in communications, self-sustaining capability, a logistics system and a chain of command, so we can superimpose ourselves into all those operations other than

war. But that is not our primary mission. Our primary mission is [still] 'warfighting'—fighting and winning our nation's wars."

The Army's increasing participation in joint and noncombat operations was at least in part the reasoning behind the redesigning of the Sergeant Major of the Army's chevrons. SMA Kidd felt that adding the American eagle to the chevrons would be symbolic of an era of increased joint operations, and that it would bring his insignia more closely in line with those of every service senior enlisted representative with an eagle or part of an eagle depicted. On 13 October 1994, General Sullivan pinned newly redesigned insignia on Kidd at a ceremony in the CSA's office.

The newly redesigned stripes feature the original two stars centered on the chevrons, but they are now separated by the familiar eagle found in the Sergeant Major of the Army shield, command sergeant major brass, and specialist rank. The stripes, stars, and American eagle represent every enlisted rank in the Army. The American eagle symbolizes the Army's link to the nation as well as the SMA's link to the Chief of Staff and to the enlisted soldiers.

Sergeant Major of the Army Kidd, like his predecessors, traveled extensively to measure the pulse of the enlisted force and keep the Army leadership informed of the soldiers' hopes and fears. Although he occasionally accompanied General Sullivan on his trips, more often he traveled elsewhere to better cover the Army, periodically meeting with other senior enlisted service representatives to share joint concerns or to exchange information prior to testimony before Congress. He also made several trips to check on troops engaged in every Army mission, always impressed by soldiers showing "the same zeal and capability as they did during the warfighting missions." During visits with soldiers in Saudi Arabia, Croatia,

Haiti, Cuba, Panama, the Sinai, and many other foreign places, as well as at hurricane relief, flooding, earthquakes, and forest fires here at home, SMA Kidd observed Guard, reserve, and active components working extremely well together, noting that “with the downsizing, we will all become even more interdependent—truly America’s Army.”

Another vital issue commanding SMA Kidd’s attention has been the NCOES program which, like his predecessors, he considered to be the key to the NCO corps’ success. With the reduction of personnel and major cuts to the Army’s budget spurring significant realignments, the NCOES program has made the final change that more closely links it to promotion and supports the Army’s “select, train, promote, assign” philosophy. Sergeant Major Kidd convinced the Army leadership of the importance of NCOES and of maintaining adequate funding so that at a minimum all promotable soldiers have the opportunity to attend NCOES schools.

Other challenges included maintaining and improving the quality of life for soldiers and their families. In particular, Sergeant Major of the Army Kidd has strongly supported initiatives such as Better Opportunities for Single Soldiers, which seeks to “provide soldier feedback to commanders and the communities . . . [and] provide soldiers with a quality of life that is more like home.” Kidd has also made health care for soldiers and their families a top priority. Here, one problem is regulatory: in effect, the number of health care professionals available to the Army is congressionally mandated to correspond with the number of troops, not with the population of family members. He thus worked hard to support innovative ways to combine the assets from military facilities and the network of health professionals in the civilian community to produce the best overall care possible for soldiers and their families.



General Sullivan presents SMA Kidd with the new Sergeant Major of the Army insignia, which Kidd designed.

Other matters that have engrossed SMA Kidd to a large degree are the Army’s policies regarding homosexuals and women in combat. Kidd has not shied away from these difficult issues, about which enlisted soldiers and their families have strong feelings. It was part of Kidd’s mission to listen to their concerns and convey them to the Army leadership. “The bottom line, overwhelmingly, is that soldiers and family members did not want the ban [against homosexuals] lifted. The women in combat issue was more an officer issue than an enlisted issue. The enlisted females feel they truly have the opportunity to go from private to CSM.” Kidd places equal importance on his duty to communicate and clarify the Army’s policies whenever he is questioned about them during his visits to the field. “I tell the soldiers what the requirement is, make sure they understand it, and that they follow it. Informed

soldiers make better career and lifetime decisions for themselves and their families.”

Sergeant Major Kidd’s working relationship with General Sullivan was much the same as that of his predecessors to their chiefs. “I have unobstructed access to the chief whenever I need it. Obviously I show the courtesy not to barge in on him whenever he has a visitor, but it has never been a problem to see him. Whenever I return from a trip, my report goes directly to him first, and then it goes out to the Army staff to handle any actions that it requires.” Kidd does not receive an NCO evaluation report. General Sullivan commented that since he did not rate three-star generals, it made no sense to rate the Sergeant Major of the Army. Their relationship, as Kidd described it, was similar to that of any commander and his sergeant major: they often sit down and informally discuss the focus and direction of their unit—only in this case, that unit is the entire Army. Kidd spends better than one-half to two-thirds of his time traveling, in order to stay in touch with the concerns of the enlisted force.

In addition to keeping the chief and Army staff informed, Kidd confers with the Secretary of Defense, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the Secretary of the Army, and the Under Secretary of the Army, among others, concerning enlisted issues. Kidd’s membership on a myriad of boards and councils also ensures that the voice of the Army’s enlisted ranks is heard in the government’s policy-making circles.

Indispensably aiding SMA Kidd in keeping abreast of the morale and condition of the enlisted force and their families is his wife Sylvia. Having been raised in a military family, she has considerable experience to draw on in making her many contributions to improve conditions for military families. In particular, Mrs. Kidd has been a tremendous help in actively developing and supporting the Army Family Team Building Program. “She is a great Mom and Army wife,” Kidd declared, recognizing all she has accomplished.

Reflecting on the future of the Office of the Sergeant Major of the Army, Kidd noted that with each SMA, the office has grown somewhat. Each SMA has looked for new ways to provide input to the Chief of Staff, participate with the Army staff in the formulation of enlisted policies, and better represent soldiers and their families. He and other senior NCOs agree that downsizing the force and the great changes in basing and deployments will be some of the major challenges facing his successors. “I have found above all, however, that soldiers just want to know what’s going on and to know the truth. They want to know that they are appreciated and that their families will be taken care of. They are proud of who they are, what they are, what they do, and how very well they do it. They do everything the nation asks of them and they do it in a most professional manner. We have the finest Army ever assembled . . . God I pray we can keep it that way . . . America’s Army all the way—Hooah!”



## Assignments

1962	Inducted into service, Fort Holabird, Maryland; Basic Training, Fort Gordon, Georgia; Infantry Radio Maintenance Course and Basic Airborne Training, Fort Benning, Georgia
1962–65	Radio Maintenance Specialist, Headquarters and Headquarters Company (HHC), 1st Airborne (Abn) Brigade, 504th Infantry; Headquarters Company, 1st Battalion (Abn), 509th Infantry; Radio Mechanic and Chief, Radio Maintenance, HHC, 2d Battalion, 509th Infantry, 8th Infantry Division, Mainz, Germany
1966–67	Communications Chief, Squad Leader, Platoon Sergeant, Company C, 2d Squadron, 5th Cavalry, 1st Cavalry Division, Republic of Vietnam; Patient, Medical Holding Company, 106th General Hospital, Japan
1967–70	Wire Foreman, HHC, 3d Battalion (Abn), 325th Infantry, 82d Airborne Division; Weapons Training (Special Forces), Company B, U.S. Army Special Forces Training Group (Abn); Light Weapons Infantryman and Heavy Weapons Leader, Company B, 6th Special Forces Group, Fort Bragg, North Carolina
1970–71	Light Weapons Infantry Adviser, U.S. Army Advisory Group (USAAG) Military Region 3; Third Regional Assistance Command, U.S. Military Assistance Command, Vietnam, U.S. Army, Pacific, Republic of Vietnam
1971–72	Chief Enlisted Adviser, USAAG (U.S. Army Reserve [USAR]), Fort Sheridan, Illinois
1972–73	Student, Advanced NCOES Course, 84th Company, 8th Student Battalion Training Student Brigade, Fort Benning
1973–76	Senior Enlisted Adviser, USAAG (USAR), Fort Sheridan (duty in Appleton, Wisconsin)
1976–77	Student, U.S. Army Sergeants Major Academy, Fort Bliss, Texas
1977–78	Infantry Operations and Intelligence Sergeant, HHC; First Sergeant, Company B, 1st Battalion, 32d Infantry, 2d Infantry Division, Republic of Korea
1978–81	First Sergeant, Combat Support Company, 2d Battalion, 1st Infantry; Command Sergeant Major, HHC, 9th Aviation Battalion; HHC, 2d Battalion, 2d Infantry, 9th Infantry Division, Fort Lewis, Washington
1981–84	Commandant, NCO Academy, 1st Armored Division, Katterbach, Germany
1984–91	Command Sergeant Major, 4th Battalion, 23d Infantry; 3d Brigade; 9th Infantry Division; 1 Corps, Fort Lewis
1991–95	Sergeant Major of the Army

## Selected Decorations and Awards

Distinguished Service Medal  
 Legion of Merit with Oak Leaf Cluster  
 Bronze Star Medal  
 Meritorious Service Medal with two Oak Leaf Clusters  
 Air Medal  
 Army Commendation Medal with Oak Leaf Cluster  
 Good Conduct Medal  
 National Defense Service Medal  
 Vietnam Service Medal  
 NCO Professional Development Ribbon  
 Army Service Ribbon  
 Overseas Service Ribbon  
 Republic of Vietnam Cross of Gallantry with Gold Star  
 Republic of Vietnam Campaign Medal  
 Combat Infantryman Badge



# Appendix

## Chronological List of Presidents, Secretaries of the Army, Chiefs of Staff, and Sergeants Major of the Army

### *President*

Lyndon B. Johnson  
22 Nov 1963–20 Jan 1969

Richard M. Nixon  
20 Jan 1969–9 Aug 1974

Gerald R. Ford  
9 Aug 1974–20 Jan 1977

### *Secretary of the Army*

Cyrus R. Vance  
5 Jul 1962–21 Jan 1964

Stephen Ailes  
28 Jan 1964–1 Jul 1965

Stanley R. Resor  
2 Jul 1965–

Stanley R. Resor  
–30 Jun 1971

Robert F. Froehlke  
1 Jul 1971–14 May 1973

Howard H. Calloway  
15 May 1973–

Howard H. Calloway  
–3 Jul 1975

Martin R. Hoffmann  
5 Aug 1975–



*President*

James E. Carter  
20 Jan 1977–20 Jan 1981

Ronald W. Reagan  
20 Jan 1981–20 Jan 1989

George Bush  
20 Jan 1989–20 Jan 1993

William J. Clinton  
20 Jan 1993–

*Secretary of the Army*

Martin R. Hoffmann  
–13 Feb 1977

Clifford L. Alexander, Jr.  
14 Feb 1977–20 Jan 1981

John O. Marsh, Jr.  
21 Jan 1981–

John O. Marsh, Jr.  
–13 Aug 1989

Michael P. W. Stone  
14 Aug 1989–20 Jan 1993

Togo D. West, Jr.  
22 Nov 1993–

*Chief of Staff of the Army*

Harold K. Johnson  
Jul 1964–Jul 1968

William C. Westmoreland  
Jul 1968–Jun 1972

Bruce Palmer, Jr. (acting)  
Jul–Oct 1972

Creighton W. Abrams  
Oct 1972–Sep 1974

Frederick C. Weyand  
Oct 1974–Sep 1976

Bernard W. Rogers  
Oct 1976–Jun 1979

Edward C. Meyer  
Jun 1979–Jun 1983

John A. Wickham, Jr.  
Jun 1983–Jun 1987

Carl E. Vuono  
Jun 1987–Jun 1991

Gordon R. Sullivan  
Jun 1991–

*Sergeant Major of the Army*

William O. Wooldridge  
Jul 1966–

William O. Wooldridge  
–Aug 1968

George W. Dunaway  
Aug 1968–Sep 1970

Silas L. Copeland  
Oct 1970–

Silas L. Copeland

Silas L. Copeland  
–Jun 1973

Leon L. Van Autreve  
Jul 1973–

Leon L. Van Autreve  
–Jun 1975

William G. Bainbridge  
Jul 1975–

William G. Bainbridge  
–Jun 1979

William A. Connelly  
Jul 1979–Jun 1983

Glen E. Morrell  
Jul 1983–Jun 1987

Julius W. Gates  
Jul 1987–Jun 1991

Richard A. Kidd  
Jun 1991–





## Further Readings

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